

INTERVIEW: BETTY EVENSON

- Subject: Betty Evenson
- Occupation: author
- Interviewer: Mark Junge
- Date: 3-14-91
- Place of Interview: Evenson's home at 1858 Jim Bridger in Casper, Wyoming
- Transcriber: Bess Arnold
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Transcriber's notes: I have deleted redundant ands, "ers", "uhs", "buts", "you knows", false starts, feedback and non-verbal sounds if it does not affect the conversation. I have used an em dash (—) to indicate a break in a sentence, resumption of a statement after an interruption, or an incomplete sentence. Parentheses are used for non-verbal sounds and brackets if I have corrected or inserted a word to indicate what was intended.

TAPE 1, SIDE A

Junge: Today is the fourteenth of March 1991. My name is Mark Junge
and I'm in the home of Betty Evenson who is a Wyoming author. And, Betty,
is this 1858 Bridger?

Evenson: 1858 Jim Bridger.

Junge: Jim Bridger. And, what would you say? —the southwestern portion of Casper,
would you?

Evenson: Mm-hmm. I think it's called the Fort Casper Addition, it was originally called,
when it was first started up here.

Junge: Okay. Well, this is sort of an interesting house. It's not like some of the others
on the block. How would you describe this house?

Evenson: Well, I don't know. It's kind of cozy. The way I described it when I bought it was that it was one of the cheaper houses in a ritzy neighborhood, rather than a ritzy house in a cheap neighborhood.

Junge: (laughs)

Evenson: It's just on the fringe of the big brick houses over on **Bellaire (St.)** that are the more fancy ones.

Junge: How long have you lived here?

Evenson: Since 1974. That's seventeen years.

Junge: Betty, what's your full name?

Evenson: Well, my real name is Lois Elizabeth (Smith) Evenson. I was called Betty Smith when I was a child.

Junge: Why weren't you called Lois?

Evenson: I think because when I first started school all the kids called me "**Lewis**" and my older sister didn't like that name, so she said, "let's start calling her Betty so they won't call her "**Lewis.**"

Junge: Was Lois the name of a grandmother?

Evenson: I don't know why I was named Lois.

Junge: L-o-i-s?

Evenson: L-o-i-s. It's quite a common name, really, but apparently it was not very common in Kansas when I started school and because people didn't seem to be very familiar with it. Hardly anybody called anybody **Elizabeth—you** know, the full name.

Junge: What is your **birthdate**?

Evenson: March 16, 1910. I'll be eighty-one Saturday.

Junge: **Alright**. Very good. Where were you born?

Evenson: I was born in Osawatomie, Kansas, and that's where the insane asylum is in Kansas. (both laugh)

Junge: Why do you mention that?

Evenson: Well, people always tell me, everybody always points that out to me that knows Kansas.

Junge: How do you spell Osawatomie?

Evenson: Oh, I don't know exactly. It think it is O-s-s-w-a-t-o-m-i-e. I think it's an Indian name.

Junge: I see. How did your folks get to Kansas?

Evenson: Well, some of my mother's relatives lived in Kansas, but my mother and father met each other in Wyoming because Mama lived in Ohio and her brother, Charlie Hemry, was running sheep **and Daddy was his camp tender. And** Mama came out from Ohio to visit her brother, and she met Daddy who was the camp tender and he was a very romantic man. So then, he had a great crush on **her** but she was very **independent. And** so she went back to **Ohio** but he wrote her letters, love letters, all the time she was in Ohio and by spring he had her talked into coming back out here and marrying him.

Junge: I see.

Evenson: But then they went back to Kansas. I don't **know, exactly**. I really can't tell you the exact **particulars. Probably** my older sister would **know** but I really don't know why they went back to Kansas.

Junge: How many were in the family?

Evenson: There were six children.

Junge: How were you placed?

Evenson: I was next to the baby, next to the last one.

Junge: Do you think there's any significance to being born in that position as far as your personality is concerned?

Evenson: I don't know. I really don't know because it was kind of interesting. Because my sister just older than I, we were kind of in two batches. The three older kids and then the three younger kids, and the three little sisters—Marjorie, the one that was older than I, was really pretty. She had pretty, long curls and I always admired her because she was so pretty. And my little sister, of course, was the baby and she was afraid of everybody. So it seems like I automatically took the role of sort of being the brash, you know, kind of brave one that always came out and asked the questions, and talked to people and stuff like that.

Junge: Do you think it had anything to do with your trying to get their attention?

Evenson: Probably. I think it must have had to do with trying to make up for not being as pretty as Marjorie and maybe to kind of compensate for Joyce's timidity, I don't know exactly.

Junge: Now, you know, they say parents will say that they treated all kids the same. They don't treat them any differently than the others, but I'm wondering myself whether that's really true or not.

Evenson: I don't know exactly. I was trying to think. I can't remember any instances in my childhood where I felt that at all because Mama was a pretty severe disciplinarian with all of us. I think that she disciplined me a little more than some because it seemed like I needed it more than some of the others. (laughs)

Junge: Now, by discipline what do you mean?

Evenson: She scolded us. She never whipped.

Junge: Did your father?

Evenson: No, Daddy never did anything to us. Daddy would just hold us on his knee and tell us stories. Mama would have to do all the disciplining.

Junge: Do you think that you get your story-telling ability from your father?

Evenson: Yes, definitely. He was a great story-teller and he was very romantic. I get my romantic notions from Daddy, too.

Junge: Uh-huh. What kind of stories did he tell you?

Evenson: Oh, about his childhood and about the people he lived with. And he had a vigorous childhood. And how he ran away from home and was adopted out. And then he came out to Colorado, started to work in the mines when he was sixteen years old and all kinds of interesting things.

Junge: You allude to that in your book but you really don't go into it very much. You talk about the field in Kansas. He worked on the farm in Kansas and the mines in Colorado. Did he tell you much about those?

Evenson: Not a lot. I always knew that. I don't know whether he worked in the mines very long or not. Might have been a brief period, you know. As a child you don't know how long those things last. I don't know. But I know that he was a farmer for quite a long time and then he did run a store a couple places in Kansas, too, but he was never very successful until he started the Bright Spot and then he came into his real success because, you see, there he had tourists who had to pay their bill. He was just a real softy when it came to giving people credit and so he was always running behind in stores and in the community because he gave everybody too much credit and then they wouldn't pay their bills.

Junge: What made him decide to come back to Wyoming?

Evenson: Uncle Charlie Hemry, the same one that had the sheep, he offered Daddy—I think they went in **together**. I was never real sure about the financial arrangement on **that** but I think they went in together. Uncle Charlie wanted to move to Casper with his family because the children were ready to go to high school, and so he asked Daddy to come out here and take over the sheep business. I think it was kind of a deal where they did it jointly financially and Daddy did the work.

Junge: There's usually a push and pull factor, I think, in history where people are pulled to a certain place, but something also tends to push them out. Were there hard times back then?

Evenson: Well, the problem with that sheep business was that it went broke the first year they came out here 'cause it was in **1919—worst** winter that Wyoming ever

had, I guess, as far as the sheep were concerned. All the sheep froze to death, so at the end of the winter Daddy didn't have any **sheep**. **So** I guess that was the end of his partnership with Uncle Charlie, I don't know. Anyhow that seemed to be—'cause then he bought a dairy herd and started to run **cows—**
and that was when the book started. That's what he was doing when the book **started—with** milking cows.

Junge: I guess I was referring to Kansas and Colorado. Was there anything in that neck of the woods that was pushing him out this direction?

Evenson: Well, I don't think Daddy ever really liked farming very well, and he wasn't very successful as a storekeeper, so I think that might have had something—I think he also had great dreams of always finding a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow somewhere, you know.

Junge: Is that where you get your dreaming from and your wanting to travel?

Evenson: Yes, I think so. Daddy was great for new experiences and new people, and I think I've had that from him because I'm the most that way of anybody in the family.

Junge: I see. So, you are more like him?

Evenson: Yes, I'm more like him than I am like my mother, I think.

Junge: Although you seem to indicate in your book that your mother went along with your father but it was just sort of her way to sort of downplay him.

Evenson: Yes, she was just a different type of person, but she really—

Junge: I mean, he would come up with an idea and she would sort of downplay it and say, “Why do you want to do something like that?” And on the other hand that was her way but she did go along with him.

Evenson: Yes, she did. She really doted on him, really, but you never would have known it because she was rather—

Junge: Did they have similar habits like getting up in the morning at the same time or did one sleep late?

Evenson: I don’t think anybody in that day and age—they got up in the morning, both of ‘em. The wife got up and got breakfast. The husband got up, and went out and did the chores. In that generation nobody stayed in bed, no couple. One didn’t sleep and the other one get up unless they were sick. There was no such thing as that. That was an altogether different thing. I remember when one of my husband’s great-aunts said to me one time that she had never—she was 80 years old and she was telling me this—there never had been a day in her life since she was married that she hadn’t cooked breakfast for her husband.

Junge: Oh, boy. How many years was she married?

Evenson: Oh, I don’t know. She was married when she was sixteen or something like that.

Junge: People were just different then.

Evenson: Well, you know that was what was expected of people to do and they did it, you know, they just didn’t—

Junge: And they might stay up all night the night before partying.

Evenson: Yeah, probably, if they had a sick kid they did, that’s for sure.

Junge: Probably, or if they had a party, I guess, from what I understand the way you write. You might talk, and dance, and carry on until the wee hours of the morning and then would have to go to work.

Evenson: Yeah. That was the way it was with my husband and me. It was a matter of opening up the store but we would take turns. It was a different generation then. One of us would sleep in and the other one would get up. Kind of like the designated driver (chuckles) —which one would get to sleep in and which one would—

Junge: (Chuckles) Right. Well, Betty, can you tell me how the Bright Spot got started. Now this is in your book, I know, but I'd like to—

Evenson: Yes, but this is for something different for people who haven't read the book that we're talking to now. Well, as I say, Daddy started to milk the dairy herd. He had a pretty good business going. He shipped raw whole milk into Casper on the train. The train went through Hiland then and then they shipped the milk cans back on the afternoon train so it worked out pretty well. But the highway at that time—and the term is very loosely used because the highways then, there's certainly no comparison to what highways are now—but it was really just a dirt road. Sometimes it was graded and sometimes it wasn't even graded, but I think it was graded mostly when we came out here. It was graded most of the way. I don't mean by that that it was surfaced or anything, it was just kind of gone over with a grader. And it changed its route. It went over about a quarter of a mile from where we lived, the highway went. But then they changed the route of the highway and brought it over by our place. And

the surveyor came in and told Daddy that they'd just surveyed the highway through his milk house, so Daddy said, "Good, that pleases me. I'll just sell these cows and put up a gas station. So he did and that was how the Bright Spot got started.

Junge: Why did he call it the Bright Spot?

Evenson: Because he had an electric light plant. He had an **electric-generated** light plant and it was the only electric lights between Casper and **Shoshoni**. **So** he was really proud of that so that's the reason he called it the Bright Spot.

Junge: It wasn't anything to do with a bright idea?

Evenson: No, it was just the idea of their being electric lights.

Junge: Was this something that your father had in his dreams or in the back of his mind to do?

Evenson: I don't hardly think so. I wouldn't say it for **positive** but I really don't believe so.

Junge: Because he had, you said before, some failures as a storekeeper.

Evenson: Mm-hmm. I think he did like the store because he liked visiting with people. He loved to have a lot of people coming in and out and that was really what he loved best about the store because it was one of things I loved best about the Bright Spot too—

Junge: Visiting with people.

Evenson: Was visiting with the different people. **But** I think that just the fact came to him kind of when he found out he was going to build this place and it was something new. I think what appealed to him in his dream was that it was a

new venture, something that wasn't done before. I mean, these other stores, like in Kansas City, there was a store on the next corner. And Kanopolis where he had another store, there was another little store at the edge of town. Here he was going to have the only gas station within miles and it was going to really be a big, exciting event for him.

Junge: Now, when he built this did he just build everything all at once or did things grow?

Evenson: He built everything all at once, pretty well everything all at once. He was very far-sighted. He had a picture of what things were going to be like in the future and it didn't take very long for things to be like that. But he was really a forerunner. Like when he said to my mother, he said, "You know, pretty soon, they're going to pave these roads and then," he said, "all these people from the East now that so many people are buying cars"—because, you see, before that hardly anybody had cars unless they were rich. "Now all these people buying cars are going to come out and see what this wild and wooly West is all about."

Junge: What was your mother's response?

Evenson: Well, I think she thought he was going a little overboard (laughs) but I can't remember her being very critical of that. Some of the other things she was rather critical of. The big gas tank, the eight thousand-gallon gas tank, buried tank which, of course, they wouldn't let him have nowadays, probably.

Junge: But that was far-sighted.

Evenson: It was very far-sighted because, you see, an eight thousand gallon tank was—you see, he got the gas by railroad then, by tank car on the railroad. And you

got it a lot cheaper if you got a full tank car. And then he got a little pipeline down to the depot, down to the railroad tracks, which were about a block away and pumped it into the underground tank. And people just thought he was crazy. This one woman, she said, “Oh,” she said, “craziest thing I ever heard of. If every car in the state of Wyoming was to take to the road next summer, and stop at Dad Smith’s place, and buy gas he’d still have four thousand gallons left when the summer was over.” (laughs) And Mama said, “I don’t usually have a very high opinion of Mrs. (Culrich’s?) foreseeing ability but this is one instance in which I’m rather inclined to agree with her.”

Junge: And they both probably had to eat crow. (both laugh)

Evenson: I’m sure they did but Daddy’s answer to that was, “Well, what does it matter?” He said, “It’ll keep. It won’t spoil. I’ll just sell it the next year if I don’t sell it that year.” But he did a lot of business there. It was really amazing.

Junge: Those old pumps were a lot different.

Evenson: Oh, yes, they were something. Well, the first pumps we had were kind of like the computerized pumps of today except, of course, they weren’t computerized. And they just had a little thing that went around and didn’t say how much you were getting or anything. It just told how—it was the most undependable thing you ever saw. I don’t know how anybody could tell how many gallons they had. I don’t think it even registered the gallons. I think it just registered the amount of money. Maybe it just registered the gallons and not the amount of money. I can’t remember that far back but I remember when I was about fourteen—I think we’d only had the store for about a year when

we got one of those visible pumps—and we thought those were so ritzy, those Bowser visible pumps. They were big things, and they stood up and you pumped up five gallons into each one of these big round glass bowls so people could see they were getting five gallons, or three gallons or whatever. And we had this one kid that worked for us for a while. He was the despair of Daddy's heart. He would go out there and he'd say, "You want five gallons?" 'cause he didn't ever want to pump it up again. He always just wanted to use one of the bowls that was already filled. (laughs) So that was where I got my idea that you always had to say? "May I fill it up?"—one of Daddy's real strict rules. And a funny little thing about that, that I don't know whether I had that in the book or not but I thought it was so funny. When I went out one time, and I asked a lady if I could fill up her car and she said, "Oh, no, I don't think it'll hold that much. Just put in a dollar's worth." (both laugh) I thought that was really funny.

Junge: I remember as a kid—these glass bowls that you're talking about—and it worked by gravity, right?

Evenson: Well, yes. You pumped up the gas and you put the hose down low enough so that it ran out the hose but it didn't shut off. The funny part was why somebody didn't invent in the beginning a shutoff at the end of the hose. But it shut off at the top of the hose at the end of the bowl, so you had to run madly over and shut it off when it was full, when you began to see it was getting full. You couldn't shut it off at the nozzle like you do now. You just had to run over and turn it off up there at the bowl which was really stupid.

Junge: On the other hand, if you were smart you would come over and before you started pumping you would probably drain the hose, wouldn't you, into your tank?

Evenson: Yes, I suppose you did, come to think of it. They must have gotten some extra that way.

Junge: (Chuckles) That's what we used to do as kids.

Evenson: Yes, that's right. I hadn't thought about that. That must have been what they did 'cause there was bound to be gas in there.

Junge: And I think there was a ringing noise every gallon or so, a ding.

Evenson: Yes, I think so. I know there was later on. I don't know whether those first ones were or not. I think you got real adept at it. I think if you got real adept at it you knew when it was almost full, and then you shut it off and then you drained it into the person's tank but either way they got the best of it, whichever way.

Junge: Did you get to be pretty good at this filling people's tanks?

Evenson: Oh, yes, I got really good at it afterwards. But, of course, that was more after I really took over, not when I was a little girl when we had those Bowser pumps.

Junge: Betty, you're not very tall. How did you service people's cars?

Evenson: It was kind of a trick to get the windshields washed when they were so far across, especially after cars got bigger and wider. I had a little step stool, just a little, low stool. And I'd stand up on it and reach across so that I could get to the middle of the windshield 'cause I always washed windshields. In fact, the day I left the Bright Spot in 1974, I washed every windshield that stopped.

Junge: And self-serve hadn't come in then?

Evenson: No, and some of the people waited on themselves if I was **busy—you** know, if I was making sandwiches or something.

Junge: Can you describe that grand opening for me? What date was that?

Evenson: It was on the fourth of **July**, and we had a ballgame in town and it was a real festive occasion.

Junge: What year was that?

Evenson: 1923. And Daddy was offering free five dollars worth of gas to anybody on either team of the baseball teams who made a homerun that day. So somebody from the opposite team, from the Waltman **team**, made a homerun, which I thought was very unfair. I said to Daddy, "I don't think you should give it to the enemy." And Daddy said he thought that the opponent was a better word than enemy. (both laugh)

Junge: A deal's a deal.

Evenson: So anyhow, we had this and free ice cream cones for everybody and I stayed in the store. Daddy was the umpire at the ballgame **e** so he had to go to the ballgame. **And** my sisters went to the ballgame except for Joyce and my little sister and, of course, she was scared of everybody that came in so I waited on the customers. **And** it was a really exciting day, I tell you, with the ice cream cones.

Junge: Does that stand out in your mind?

Evenson: Very much so.

Junge: Did you have fireworks?

Evenson: I don't think so. I don't think we had any fireworks then. Later on we always had fireworks in the evening at Hiland, but just for ourselves. But I don't believe we had any fireworks then. I was wondering if fireworks among just the ordinary people were very common back then. I don't know.

Junge: Was it a good business decision to open up on the fourth of July?

Evenson: Oh, I'm sure it would have been but, really, Daddy had had it open a little bit before then. This just was a kind of official grand opening but I think it was a good day because people were apt to be traveling around going to see some of their relatives or something like that.

Junge: Did you have to work at the store or did you get to take part in the activities?

Evenson: Oh, I worked at the store but that was part of the activities and that was what I'd rather be doing by far than to go to the ballgame. I'd seen a million ballgames. They weren't very exciting to me. It was much more fun to work at the store.

Junge: You were thirteen years old when that opened up.

Evenson: Mm-hmm.

Junge: I'm sure that's vivid in your sisters' memories too.

Evenson: Yes. I think it is. I think it is pretty much so, especially in my younger sisters, the three younger ones.

Junge: Did you all have your chores to do?

Evenson: Yeah. Well, we always had to wash the dishes and we carried in wood and coal. Well, we helped with the washing, the laundry too, but mostly after we got the store most of the time I helped in the store 'cause I liked it best. I liked

to work in the store the best. The others, Joyce and Marjorie, they would rather do the other chores but I'd rather wait on the customers. But then my older sister—you see, the older kids had all left home by that time—my older sister was in college and Rodney, my brother, was at West Point. He was a West Point appointee.

Junge: He was one of the three in the first batch?

Evenson: He was one of the three in the first batch. My other sister stayed at home because she was the first postmaster that we had there.

Junge: Who was that?

Evenson: My sister Helen Smith. She died quite a good many years ago.

Junge: Everybody else is still alive?

Evenson: No, my sister Marjorie is dead and my younger sister, Joyce, just died this fall, which was a really traumatic thing for me because she lived here and we were very close. She and Faye and I were very close.

Junge: So who all is left?

Evenson: There's just Faye, and myself and Rodney, the boy.

Junge: Now where do they live?

Evenson: Rodney lives in Washington, D.C. in Annandale, Virginia, and Faye (Edgar?) lives here and I live here.

Junge: You said that you liked to wait on people, but on the other hand, in your book you mention how the very first occasion you had to wait on somebody was not quite that way.

Evenson: (Laughs) I was scared, yes. I was really scared.

Junge: What happened?

Evenson: Well, I got where I was pretty good. Well, Daddy had gone down to the railroad 'cause he ran a gasoline pump that pumped water up into the big water tank for the steam engines to take water when they went through Hiland, so he'd gone down to start that motor. He left me in charge. And for some reason—I don't know why I was so scared. I had often waited on customers but it was when Daddy was there. It was the first time, I guess, that I had ever had to absolutely be by myself. And somebody drove up to the gas pump, and they honked their horn, and all of a sudden I was just panicked with fear. And I couldn't go out there, and I couldn't wait on them, and I just kind of hid behind the counter and pretty soon this man drove away. And I was hoping that Daddy wouldn't know this but I should have known he would because he had eyes in the back of his head when it came to the Bright Spot. The first thing he said when he came in was, "You had a customer get away, didn't you?" I said, "Yes." So then he scolded me pretty much for him. He was pretty mild about scolding. Then he took me on his lap and he said, "Now, honey, don't you see," he said, "that every time one customer doesn't get waited on here, he goes and says to somebody else: "You can't depend on that place at Hiland. They don't have dependable service and don't stop there. So," he said, "you have to consider every customer. It's very important.

Junge: That was a good way to do it.

Evenson: He was really a wonderfully kind and sweet man.

Junge: Did your mother also greet the customers?

Evenson: No, Mother had nothing to do with the store. I guess that must have been the ultimatum she probably laid down when Daddy decided to build it, I don't know, because she practically never waited on customers. She'd do something in the store if it were necessary. She washed the dish towels, kept things like that done, but she didn't come over to the store and do hardly anything.

Junge: Did she ever tell you why?

Evenson: I don't know. I just took it for granted she didn't do it, so I never thought about it much.

Junge: Maybe this was his idea and whether it would succeed or fail it was going to be his.

Evenson: Yes. I think maybe so. I don't think there was any friction between them about it. I know that when he first said he was going to cook the hams and make ham sandwiches she said, "Well, you don't need to depend on me to cook those hams for you because I'm not going to do it." So, he did it and very well.

Junge: That was a real innovation, something that lasted clear through the history.

Evenson: Yes, uh-huh. And, really, it was a hard chore, too. Oh, my. When I think of when Daddy first started to cook those hams. The hams then were very heavily salted, you know, and very heavily smoked—not like they are now with half water. They're entirely different. And so Daddy would cook them in this big kettle, and he would put cold water on them and drain them six times sometimes—put cold water on them again, and drain that water off when it

came to a boil, and then put that cold water on them again. Goodness, what a lot of work.

Junge: Yeah. How many hams did you go through a day?

Evenson: I don't know. Well, a ham usually lasted us about—you could make about eighty sandwiches out of a ham if you cut it right, out of the size hams that we used. They usually lasted us about two days. We usually cooked the ham about every second or third day, depending on the season and how busy we were.

Junge: Now, you've got a name for these things.

Evenson: Yeah. "Home Baked Sagebrush Ham Sandwiches".

Junge: Where does that name come from?

Evenson: Well, he just made that up. He thought the sagebrush sounded great. Mama didn't think much of that either. She said, "Why would anybody want to eat anything that had any connection with that nasty-smelling sagebrush?" I loved the smell of sagebrush myself but Mama didn't share my enthusiasm. (both laugh)

Junge: Did the customers think that it was cooked with sagebrush?

Evenson: Yes, people kept saying, "What is the sagebrush?" and Daddy would just say, "Oh, that's a secret." Then when I was running it by myself when I was alone for the last four years, I just told people, "There isn't any sagebrush in it, that's just a name." But they didn't really believe me. They preferred to believe that it had some sagebrush in it.

Junge: You know, when I went through your book and listened to you talk about all the things you made and did, the (unintelligible), I got some memories flashing back and one or two terms that came to **mind**. **One** term that came to mind that I hadn't thought of for a long time was **"chocolate shower" (ice cream)**. **Today it's "chocolate chip", but (then it was) "chocolate shower"**.

Evenson: Mm-hmm. Chocolate shower. It was better than chocolate chip, too, because it was much finer. The grating was much finer. It's just barely tiny showers of chocolate.

Junge: And I remember buying pop at the local corner grocery store in Denver and they stacked it up, too, or maybe they put it in racks, but bottled pop was the way you bought pop.

Evenson: Uh-huh. See, they didn't make canned pop at all until—I don't know, when did they start making canned pop? I don't really know. I can't remember 'cause I never did stock it if I could help it 'cause I never thought pop was fit to drink except in a bottle. That was how I was trained to do it all my life, you know.

Junge: And Coke got to where it was a big seller.

Evenson: Oh, yeah. Coke outsold everything. Now, I guess, Pepsi outsells **Coke**. **But** you see, Coke was in existence for such a long time before Pepsi even made its appearance on the scene when it came to pop.

Junge: Was there ever any cocaine in Coke?

Evenson: I don't know. Is that where it got its name, from cocaine?

Junge: Some people have told me in the past that they used it with babies—I mean spread it on the gums of babies because it had cocaine in it. It was supposed to have sort of a sedative effect, I don't know.

Evenson: Well, the only thing I ever heard that you used with babies that was a sedative was paregoric and that wouldn't have been the same thing, I wouldn't think. They used to do that when babies were teething, I don't know.

Junge: Now, when they bought gas, would they just stop, park their car, come in and eat, or would they just usually go on down the road?

Evenson: Well, it just depended. When I first started, I'd say for maybe the first twenty years—well, not that long, probably about the first fifteen years-- people didn't eat excepting at meal time. I mean, they would plan to be there at lunch time and stop and get a sandwich, but if they had to stop for gas they wouldn't eat food because it wouldn't be lunchtime yet. And they never took food with them. That was something people never did. You never took anything along with you in car ever.

Junge: Oh, you didn't?

Evenson: Uh-uh. They stopped and ate and--even pop. I remember when Mama was telling Daddy that about how he said he was going to have—she said that was ridiculous to stock all that soda pop. She said soda pop was just something that you give to children for children's parties. He said, "No, people are going to be drinking it a lot. You'll see," he said, "because the time's going to come when they'll take it along in the car with them." And Mama thought that was just ridiculous. (both chuckle) But then later on, I guess it was, oh, I suppose

maybe it was only about ten years that I'm thinking of that they always stopped at noon because after that people started eating at different times of the day. They'd eat whenever they got there, whether it was ten o'clock, or three o'clock, or four o'clock or whatever.

Junge: How many people would you have in the store for a meal?

Evenson: Oh, it just depends. Some days you'd have a whole lot. Now, like when the buses were in, then you'd really have a lot of people. But when we first started I would say there would probably be—we had three tables when we first started and I would say those would probably be filled. And some people kind of waited to sit down or standing at the counter, but probably not a great many, I'd say.

Junge: But you had a good reputation for food.

Evenson: Oh, yes, because the food was good. I will say that. It was very—we never cut any corners on it because whatever we served was the same food we ate ourselves as it had to come up to our own standards. And just—even the coffee. I remember when—my husband was a Norwegian and was a great coffee drinker, and whenever the coffee got—we had one of those Silex's. That was later on, of course. That was not at the time we started it. And whenever it got to where Maurice thought it wasn't good coffee we dumped it out and made some fresh so that the customers would have fresh coffee. Because everything—we always buttered the bread over to the edges, and put a lot of meat in the sandwiches and it was really good food. But we didn't do any cooking. We didn't do hamburgers, or hotdogs or anything like that. The

only time I did any cooking was for people I knew that were Catholics that were friends of mine. I'd fry eggs and make them an egg sandwich on Friday.

That was the only time I did any cooking.

Junge: I see. Otherwise they got cold cuts and pop.

Evenson: Otherwise they got sandwiches and coffee.

Junge: What were your prices in those days?

Evenson: Well, the home-cooked ham sandwiches started out at fifteen cents **apiece**.

Imagine draining the ham six times and charging fifteen cents for a sandwich.

(both laugh) Oh, dear. But then we raised it to a quarter somewhere along in there right after the Depression, I think, and then during the Second World War we brought it up to thirty-five cents, and people screamed and they thought that was **terrible**. **And** when I left Hiland, which was in 1974, I was **charging** ninety-five cents and I was making two cents on a sandwich, and that didn't count the work, but I just didn't have the heart to make them any higher **because everybody** was used to paying that and I couldn't bear to charge anymore than that.

Junge: Now you made pies, too, didn't you?

Evenson: Yes. At the beginning I made pies and cakes both.

Junge: Pretty good ones?

Evenson: Oh, yes. I was a fabulous cook. You'd never know it now. I never cook a thing. You'd think I never baked a pie or anything in my life.

Junge: Well, if you don't have anybody to bake for....

Evenson: I used to make these green apple pies a lot and I made chocolate cake. I remember the chocolate cakes **were—I** made those big, luscious, layer cakes, you know**w**, and charged fifteen cents a slice for **those**. **And** the pie, I think, was fifteen cents.

Junge: Where did you learn to cook?

Evenson: Well, I love to cook for one thing and I don't know, I just like—I did that cooking after I was married and when I first got married I just tried to cook everything under the sun. I was one of those people that just was going to be the **A-number-1** wife and cook, you know. I was just going to do everything perfect.

Junge: Now, you talk a little bit in your book—well, a lot actually —about conveniences and **appliances**. **And** I would imagine you've seen quite a change in **those, like irons**, refrigerators, and **whatnot** over the years since the first day.

Evenson: Oh, yes. Let's see, we had, I **guess—when** we first **started.... When** Bright Spot first **started** it seems to me that we always did the ironing over at the house. I think Mama must have done most of the ironing. I don't think I did much of anything like **that**. **But** after I got married**d** we moved one of the cabins over**,** and connected it to the store and that was my house where Maurice and I lived. And then I remember I did the ironing **then**. **But** I think by that time we had those **gasoline-powered** irons that you filled up **like—had** a tiny little tank on it and you pumped it up **p** kinda' like a gasoline lantern.

Junge: Were they **kerosene-burning**?

Evenson: No. I think they were gasoline-burning. I think. I think they were like a gasoline lantern, like a gas lantern.

Junge: Hmm. Was that such an improvement?

Evenson: Oh, yes, because, you see, those other irons—have you ever seen what they used to call sad irons? I always figured the only reason they called them sad is ‘cause it made you sad to have to use them.

Junge: (Chuckles)

Evenson: You put them on a heating stove, you know, on a kitchen range. And then they had a little handle that you go over and pick it up with that, and bring it over, and iron with it a little while and they were just real heavy. You had no way to control the amount of heat except, you know, you just had to move it real fast if it was real hot and, oh, they were horrible. They were just kind of heavy and coarse and didn’t have a fine point on them like irons do nowadays.

Junge: Was your mother persnickety about ironing and washing?

Evenson: No, she wasn’t a terribly fussy housekeeper at all for things like that, no. And she wasn’t even an especially good cook. There were certain things that she was a marvelous good cook at, but she never really cared for cooking, really. She probably would have been a good career woman if she’d have lived in a different age.

Junge: Do you think so?

Evenson: Uh-huh. I think so. Because she had this big family but I don’t think she really especially wanted six kids.

Junge: What do you think she would have wanted to do?

Evenson: Maybe something like dressmaking. She was a good seamstress. She sewed for us. She made all our clothes. I'd say maybe a dressmaker or a milliner, to make hats or maybe some headwork of some kind. She was very intelligent.

Junge: But she never expressed that to you.

Evenson: No, I don't think it ever occurred to her that she could have done that, I don't believe.

Junge: Women just accepted things in that day, didn't they?

Evenson: Mm-hmm. And even after she got older, you know, after we were more acquainted, I don't believe she ever thought about what she might have done. And she probably would have told me if we'd ever discussed it but I don't believe it ever occurred to her what she might do.

Junge: She never expressed any regrets to you?

Evenson: No. No. Not really.

Junge: Do you think that, looking back on it now, that women really had a rough lot, Betty?

Evenson: Oh, yes. They had a rough lot back in Mama's day. They did. Just imagine. Imagine having six kids, not very much money, and having to wash diapers and sew for the kids and cook for that many people with a range, you know, a wood range. Oh, I think they had a rugged—and wash on a board, not on a washing machine—and iron with those sad irons.

Junge: It would seem to me that people would get down, depressed.

Evenson: Yeah. It's odd that they didn't but I don't think my mother was ever depressed. That I don't think. She sang. She always sang at her work. My

earliest memory was her singing church hymns while she worked. She was not an especially religious woman. I mean, we didn't have Bible reading or anything like that or she never—we had a book of Bible stories that we read to each other, but she always sang church hymns. And she would sing. And she would recite poetry to us. She would recite—I think she could remember every poem she learned when she was in the fifth and sixth grade. She'd recite Tennyson and people like that, great long poems about into the five hundred *(Into the valley of Death Rode the six hundred "The Charge of the Light Brigade" by Alfred Lord Tennyson)* and all those kind of poems.

Junge: She could remember those?

Evenson: All those, and she could just recite them off like mad and with great emphasis, you know. I mean she was a beautiful speaker.

Junge: You picked that up from her didn't you?

Evenson: Well, I don't know.

Junge: Well, tell me about learning how to read. I think this is a fascinating story.

Evenson: Yes. That really is something. Oh, I have one more thing to say about the irons before we get through.

Junge: Yeah.

Evenson: Then we—you see—then we had the iron that we had on the generator. See, that was a pretty good deal because that was after we got a light plant that had a battery so we didn't have to have it run all the time. But you couldn't have a thermostat for this. So then, you see, after we got the REA (*Rural Electric Association*) we got the thermostat iron. So then we finally got uptown irons.

Junge: Well, we were going on and on about appliances. Well, let's continue in that vein and then come back.

Evenson: Oh, that's **alright**. I think that's all I had to say about that.

Junge: But refrigeration. I was born in '43 and raised during the '50s, and I remember a lady down the block, Mrs. Leebrick, who had an icebox. And it was a true icebox in which you'd have to store ice and then drain the **tray**. **And** the iceman from Alcott Coal and Ice would drive down the block in his truck, and he'd take out his tongs, and whip the canvas back and pull out a big chunk of ice.

Evenson: And they'd put a cardboard in the window that would say they wanted ice that day or didn't want ice that day.

Junge: Is that the way it was?

Evenson: Mm-hmm.

Junge: But, you know, it hasn't been all that long ago. I mean, we're talking about the '50s.

Evenson: Yes, that's rather surprising that you still had them then.

Junge: Well, considering probably most everybody in the block—

TAPE 1, SIDE B

Junge: Well, we're back on after taking a little bit of a break there, and talking with Betty about some of the appliances that she had to use and, I guess you'd say, put up with, wouldn't you, Betty?

Evenson: Yes, I guess so. (chuckles) But we didn't really feel deprived because, you see, we had never known that all these other things were going to come into existence.

Junge: Well, you made it seem like as things got developed that they were getting improved, some of these things.

Evenson: Yes, they **were**. **But**, you see, we didn't know when we had the old things that they were going to be this good so we didn't feel bad when we had the old **things**. **Because**, you see, when you didn't know you're doing without then it's no problem 'cause you don't know what it's going to be like.

Junge: That right. And we were talking about refrigerators, now, the old ice boxes.

Evenson: Yeah, and that great big refrigerator that we got, that big meat case. It was really meant for a big store, you know, for a butcher shop or something like that. We [cooled] the pop in it and we kept what meat we had but we would handle fresh meat then, which we didn't later because we couldn't keep it that well. Meat didn't keep as well.

Junge: But you do remember using ice?

Evenson: Well, when we were in Kansas we had **iceboxes** but we didn't have one of those **old-fashioned** iceboxes in Wyoming. We didn't have any **icebox**, any refrigeration in our house in Wyoming. **We** just put stuff in the cellar until we got the store.

Junge: Root cellar?

Evenson: No, it was just a basement under the house.

Junge: Did your mother can?

Evenson: Not if she could help it. (both chuckle) She hated that sort of thing. That's what makes me think she wasn't very domestic. She canned some 'cause that was the only way she could keep food for that family without having very much money, but she was more likely to put down things like cabbage and beets or carrots or stuff that you put in the sand instead of canning.

Junge: Did you have a garden?

Evenson: Yes, we always had a garden but we didn't have in Hiland 'cause you couldn't grow anything in Hiland unless you had water on it.

Junge: Oh, you didn't have a garden in Hiland?

Evenson: No, uh-uh.

Junge: Nothing really grew there?

Evenson: Not very well unless you poured a lot of water on it. Poor, sandy soil.

Junge: Did you have a well?

Evenson: Oh, yes, we had a good well. It was 175 feet deep, though, which was pretty—in those days that was a pretty deep well.

Junge: Was the water good?

Evenson: Mm-hmm. First water wasn't. We had water at 125 and it was real alkali but the second water was good.

Junge: I see. Now, you talked about the chips of ice

Evenson: Oh, yes. Mm-hmm. We'd get big chunks of ice when we came to Casper, and wrap them up in a blanket and take 'em home or (a) friend would bring them to us. It was like this friend of mine said, "If you want Betty to love you, just

bring her a chunk of ice.” Said, “She’ll take T-bone steaks out of the freezer and let ‘em thaw in order to get that ice put away.”

Junge: (Chuckles) One of the things that you started to talk about in your book but I really didn’t get too much information from was the early telephone system.

Evenson: Oh, yes. Well, see now, in the early days apparently, as I understand it—now this is not too much from memory because I was too young to pay any attention. See, I was eight years old when we came out to Wyoming and at that time in the house, in the Hemry’s house where we lived—Uncle Charlie’s house—was a toll station telephone. So I think every so often the telephone company put in a toll telephone, which had to be—it was only a long-distance phone. You couldn’t make any local calls on it but you could use it as a long-distance phone. It would be kind of like, maybe, you know, a pay phone would be a station phone. You know what I mean.

Junge: Mm-hmm.

Evenson: Kind of like—because I remember when World War I was over the operator called us and told us that the war was over. And they did a lot of—you know—it was a personalized sort of thing.

Junge: Did people listen in on conversations?

Evenson: Yeah, I imagine they did. I would think they would, although it wasn’t like a party line exactly ‘cause not everybody had a phone, see. There was just very few phones. Like, for instance, in Hiland there would have been probably, oh, maybe ten families living there earlier. There weren’t that many when we were there, and none of them would have had a phone, but if they’d have

wanted to make a call out, they could have come to that house and made a long-distance call.

Junge: And then they were charged?

Evenson: Yes. I don't know how the charge went. I don't know how that worked. I was just wondering about that.

Junge: It used to be long distance to Casper, didn't it?

Evenson: Uh-huh. Yes. For a long time it was.

Junge: And that was quite a relief not to have—

Evenson: Yes, it was nice not to have the long distance to Casper. I think it was about in the '50s that we got where it wasn't long distance to Casper.

Junge: Was there always a steady stream of traffic going down that highway?

Evenson: Pretty much so. Yeah. It was almost always—there were periods when it was better than other times. During the Depression it wasn't as good back in the early '30s, you know, but there always some traffic, and there was always some Wyoming people traveling and then there were always some tourists.

Junge: That used to be called, you said, the AYP.

Evenson: Mm-hmm.

Junge: Atlantic—

Evenson: Atlantic Yellowstone Pacific.

Junge: Did they mark that highway near your store?

Evenson: Well, they had this big rock, big rock painted yellow. It was a yellow stone and they put AYP on it in black. I think they had one of those very close to Hiland. I can't remember now just where it was.

Junge: Did your dad ever have to go out and help these people to get through?

Evenson: My dad didn't so much, but my husband did. You see, he came in 1929, my husband. He became Daddy's business partner in 1929 and the road was not paved yet. It wasn't surfaced yet then but it was graded. It was a little bit better than it was in 1923 but between Shoshoni and Hell's Half Acre it wasn't graveled. It was graveled from Hell's Half Acre to—no, it wasn't either. It wasn't graveled at that time—well, maybe it was, I don't know. It wasn't earlier. It might have been graveled from Hell's Half Acre to Casper, I'm not sure, because I know the tourists would get there and they would be just panic-stricken with fear because of the mud. That was the gumbo stretch right in there, and it was just slicker than slick and they were panic-stricken 'cause they'd never driven on a dirt road before. So they would get Maurice to drive them to Shoshoni. Now if they were coming the other way he'd drive them to Hell's Half Acre, and then he'd wait until somebody wanted to come back the other way and then he'd drive them back. (both chuckle) But he made enough money to take us on our honeymoon that way.

Junge: I see. How did Maurice come into your life?

Evenson: Well, Daddy decided he'd be a good business partner for him. He worked for the highway and they had a little trailer—kind of a trailer-truck, beginning of, similar to a trailer house—where he and another young man were staying while they were working on the highway. I presume they must have been graveling it, or grading it or doing something to it then. Anyhow, that was when they got acquainted. They stayed there for about, oh, I think they were

there for two or three weeks, and they would come up to the store in the evening and play cards with Daddy. I never paid much attention to him. I didn't hardly notice him. And I think I must have spoken to him several times when he bought coffee off of something, or me probably, but I didn't really pay much mind to him. But then Daddy had talked to him a lot so he decided that he would be a good man to bring in as a partner because he was a mechanic. He was the State Highway Department top mechanic on their heavy equipment. So that was why he was there. And he was a top-notch mechanic. So Daddy thought that was what he needed there was a good mechanic, and he did because lots of people's cars broke down and Daddy didn't know anything at all about cars. That was something that was not in his field at all. So he asked Maurice if he'd like to come in with him. He told him he'd take him on as a partner without any—Maurice didn't have to put a cent of capital in it and he'd start immediately sharing the profits half-and-half.

Junge: Your mother didn't quite like that.

Evenson: No, Mother didn't think much of that. She said, "Well, you know that there's two of your daughters that are not married yet so I hope you know you're picking yourself out a son-in-law." Daddy said, "Oh, I don't think that's necessarily so." But she was right, of course. (chuckles)

Junge: But it took you a while to catch on to Maurice, didn't it?

Evenson: That's right. (chuckles) Yeah. I didn't think too much of him when he first came. Although he had a snappy little car. That's what you judged people by

in my youth was if they had a nice car and if they were a good dancer. That's the two things you thought about in a man.

Junge: Did he fill the bill?

Evenson: Yes, he did. He was a beautiful dancer. I was sure he wouldn't be a good dancer because he was kind of a prim-looking young man, very sedate and very, sort of, you know. I don't know, he was nice-looking, really, but he was just—

Junge: He wasn't homely, was he?

Evenson: No, he wasn't really homely, but he was just pretty reserved, you know, very reserved and very cool. About as opposite to me as you could possibly find. (both chuckle) But then when he first came he was wearing a checkered cap and tan shoes and I didn't think that was a very good wardrobe for a man. So I was probably getting my ideas from some of the ritzy magazines that I read all the time. (chuckles)

Junge: Oh, I see. Isn't it funny how sometimes you pay no attention to certain people, and you think they're just not worth your time and then they kind of grow on you?

Evenson: Yeah, that's true. But he turned out to be a beautiful dancer and—

Junge: Do you remember when he first proposed to you, or did that happen?

Evenson: No, I'm trying to think. Maybe I proposed to him. I'm not really sure. I was trying to think. Yes, I think it was on the night we came into Casper to see (unintelligible) with Maurice Chevalier. I remember that movie. It was at the Rialto. I remember that clearly and the moon was shining. (chuckles) On the

way home, oh, it was so romantic and I think for once Maurice was very romantic that night. Maurice was not really very romantic and so I think that's when he proposed.

Junge: What did you say?

Evenson: Well, I can't remember. I'm sure I said yes (chuckles) but I can't remember just what the particulars were on it.

Junge: Well, now, you didn't expect him to just sweep you away and take you away from Hiland, did you?

Evenson: Oh, no. No, indeed. I wouldn't have gone away from Hiland. Really, I don't think at that stage of my life I don't think I would have. I think I just thought my life was there. In fact, I think that's why I always sort of took it for granted that I would marry him and he kinda' took it for granted that I'd marry him 'cause I kinda' came along with the package, you know, along with the store.

Junge: Do you think he had the store in his mind too?

Evenson: Oh, I think so. Both of us did, I think, but I sort of wanted him to pretend a little bit more that it was more romantic. (chuckles)

Junge: You wished he was a little bit more adventurous.

Evenson: Yeah, well more—

Junge: Romantic.

Evenson: Yes. More romantic and doting on me. I wanted him to just worship the ground I walked on, you know, and he was not a bit inclined to do that for anybody, which was probably why I really loved him underneath 'cause he didn't let anybody walk on him. In fact, he was wonderful for the store

because he kind of curbed some of Daddy's over-generosity. He cut people off. He said when they've got that much of a bill they either have to pay it or they don't get anymore.

Junge: Do you think it's better business to be like your Dad or to be like Maurice?

Evenson: I think it's kind of nice to have a mixture like they were, really. But I think probably Maurice was the better businessman as far as—. But I don't know if I could say that either because I don't think he probably could have started that business in the same way Daddy did, because I think he would have been too practical.

Junge: He was better to come in and take over afterward.

Evenson: Yes. It worked out good the way it was. It just worked out perfectly 'cause he was real good with making improvements and doing things that Daddy had kind of let go. But, you see, Daddy was so good with the personal, and Daddy had the charisma, and Maurice was —. People that knew Maurice liked him and respected him. He was a man that commanded a good deal of respect but they probably didn't love him in the same way that they loved Daddy.

Junge: Mm-hmm. Sometimes girls marry guys who are like their fathers.

Evenson: I really think, basically—to be honest with you, since you told me to be honest—I really think that I married him as a matter of convenience because of the store. And I think—I mean, I liked him. I think he was fine. It was just okay with me to marry him but I think that that was partly the reason—you see, Daddy and Mama were going to Panama to visit my brother who was stationed in Panama. We couldn't hardly stay there and run the store alone

without being married. In those days people didn't do that sort of thing. So we decided to get married. (laughs).

Junge: Mm-hmm. Well, I suppose over the years, though, that Maurice and you grew closer.

Evenson: Oh, yes. Of course, you see, nobody'd admit **that**. **We** didn't admit that.

Mama, nor Daddy, nor Maurice or I admitted that was the reason we got married **but** I think it had a lot to do with it. But as Maurice and I both had a great deal of responsibility toward the store, and toward each other and toward Christy. Christy was the big binding force in our **life—my** daughter.

Junge: Let's go back a little bit, Betty. I'm interested in learning more about this phenomenon of reading.

Evenson: Oh, yes. That was really astonishing. I don't understand it myself. See, I started to school in Kansas when I was about five years **old**. **And** I had this little primer, and the teacher would call on us **every day** and have us read a couple of pages. **So** I would just get my sister, Marjorie, to read me **those—** **tell** me what **those—two** pages said, and would memorize it and then I would read **it**. **And** I could read it just as well upside down or backward or anything else, 'cause I couldn't read it. **I** just didn't know what those little things meant. I just knew it by memory. And then one day I just looked at it, and all of a sudden I knew what all those words **were, and** I just started **in**. **I** read my two **pages, and** I just continued and read the whole primer.

Junge: Could it be that maybe your mind was blocking out a whole long period in which you had to read it word by word?

Evenson: I don't think so because I could read all these things I'd never heard of before.

I don't understand how I could do that. So then I borrowed my sister's second reader, and started reading it and then when I got home that night, I said, to the folks, I said, "I can read now." My brother made great fun of me. He said, "Oh, yeah. I'm sure you can." He said, "Here read this" and gave me this book that my sister had gotten that day from the library and it was *Ruth Fielding's Days at College* (The Ruth Fielding Series by Alice B. Emerson). I don't know who wrote it but it was a kind of a book for adolescents. I opened it up and I started reading it, reading about this picnic that the girls were having on the banks of the river that was close to the college. And I just read that whole page without missing a word, and even proper names in it and I'd never seen the book before.

Junge: How do you explain that?

Evenson: I can't. I don't understand how to explain it but I could read everything then.

It was magic. It was just a miracle.

Junge: Has anybody ever tried to explain it to you?

Evenson: No. I never had anybody try to explain it. I just don't know how that happened. It was real strange.

Junge: So, all of a sudden—then what did you do? Did you start reading?

Evenson: Oh, I just read everything I could get hold of. I read all the time.

Junge: Indiscriminately. You just started picking up stuff?

Evenson: Mm-hmm. I read all the books at school, you know, all the schoolbooks—the readers and stuff like that. Mostly I just read children's books because I think they were more interesting to me.

Junge: Your parents can read, right?

Evenson: Yes. Now, Mama was a great reader. Daddy didn't read very much. Daddy had only had a sixth-grade education. Now, I think it's real amazing when you think of it that Daddy had only a sixth-grade education and yet he could work out all the necessary economic and technical details of building that store, and starting it, and all the economic stuff and without any education. He knew all that stuff, you know.

Junge: Well, maybe it was like your husband's mechanical ability.

Evenson: Yeah, I guess it was, maybe. Mm-hmm.

Junge: Well, then did you read a lot of romance novels?

Evenson: No, I mostly read just children's books. I read them over, and over and over again. No, I never read romance novels at all until I started to write for the confession magazines. I never read that kind of stuff. I thought that was trash. (laughs). I was a literary snob. I wouldn't have been caught dead reading that kind of stuff. (both laugh)

Junge: That's interesting.

Evenson: Had to eat my words. (laughs)

Junge: Yes. Well, you know, you talk about life at the Bright Spot. Do you look back now and say that was a better life? That was a better time?

Evenson: Yes, in a lot of ways. I mean, a lot of the things about it were. It wasn't all beer and skittles by any means. I mean there were lots of unpleasant things, and lots of hard things and lots of days when I would have given anything not to have to get up and wait on a customer when I didn't want to—not having any privacy and all that. But I think it was a better time of life and it was a wonderful place to live because I really lived in the country. And yet I didn't live out away from people 'cause I saw people all the time. And I didn't live an isolated life 'cause I had enough money to travel, and see things and do things. For me it was just the ideal kind of a life because I liked to be by myself some of the time and then I liked to be out some of the time. Like, I liked to go to New York City but I wouldn't have lived there for a million dollars.

Junge: Was it a good place for a kid to grow up?

Evenson: Well, I thought it was a good place. I didn't know whether my daughter now thinks it was or not but I think she does. It was an ideal place, really, in a way because she had a taste of a cross section of the people in the world. And the difference—you know, she wasn't confined to just one little section of humanity, and mores and all that sort of thing.

Junge: So it's not quite the remote kind of place that maybe people think.

Evenson: No, it really wasn't. It was very surprisingly not that way because we really—I don't know if this is true of all those little places like that but for us it was nice because we were well educated. We were well versed in what was going on in the world. We were interested in everything and so we weren't really

“hicky,” you know. We really weren’t “hickish” and we really—I don’t know, it just seems like we had an **ideal, that** we had all that beautiful country around us.

Junge: And those open spaces mean a lot to you.

Evenson: Mm-hmm. Oh, I missed that. When I first moved to town **n** I used to take the car and drive out to the edge so I could see the sunset decently without all these trees and houses around blocking my view.

Junge: And yet you probably got just the opposite reaction from visitors or passersby.

Evenson: Oh, yes. Everybody would say, “Oh, isn’t it wonderful since you’ve come to town. You must see so many more people.” I said, “I don’t see half as many as I did when I lived in Hiland.” (laughs) But I think it was kind of an ideal life, although I’m sure I am idealizing it more as I get older. That’s natural, I think. I think you do **that. But** it really wasn’t by any means perfect and I think Christy hated it sometimes because it often interfered with the things we wanted to **do,** because we couldn’t just close up the store and go to a recital or something. One of us had to stay in the store and the other one had to go with her to her recital.

Junge: You know, I read your book and it makes me think about **things. And** I wonder if maybe Wyoming people aren’t a little schizophrenic in that they are awfully proud of their wide open spaces**,** awfully proud that they live in the least populated state in the **country. And** it seems like when they get out in a crowd—and this maybe happens to me, maybe that’s why I’m saying this—that they are a little insecure about that on the other hand. I mean, it’s like—

“Well, I come from the great state of Wyoming. But on the other hand, you know, we’re just as smart as you and we’re just as good as you.

Evenson: Kind of on the defensive.

Junge: Yeah, exactly. Do you think of this?

Evenson: Well, let’s see, I was trying to think if I felt that very much. I suppose I did. I think I did quite a bit, especially socially I think I did somewhat. But now, like, for instance, when I would go to visit Rodney and his army friends I would kind of feel on the defensive, I think, because I would think they would think I was awfully out of it—you know, I’m hickish and all that sort of thing.

Junge: Mm-hmm.

Evenson: But inside myself I never felt that way, really.

Junge: That’s the impression I got from your book.

Evenson: I just kind of felt in myself that it was okay and I think I kind of, I don’t know, I kind of understood how other people would feel about it because I think I could understand how they would think about me living out there.

Junge: What I think about when you talk about that episode of yourself in Chicago in which you got off the train and you went to see this Evelyn Swarthout?

Evenson: Yes, Gladys Swarthout.

Junge: Gladys Swarthout. And you didn’t have your best clothes on. You had to make it snappy. You had to get to the play, or the opera or whatever.

Evenson; Mm-hmm. Opera.

Junge: Opera. And the people around you were dressed a little bit better. And then at first you felt a little insecure in that but then as you became interested in the

opera, why, you just forgot all about that. But it made me think, you know,
“Betty, in a way, represents some other Wyoming people who maybe do feel a
little bit insecure in their supposed backward ways, but on the other hand,
inside they’re very, very proud of where they come from and their
background.” Does that make any sense?

Evenson: Yeah, yeah. I understand what you mean. And I think that that is true. I think
I always did feel pretty proud, you know. Not really inferior, even though I
thought people might think I was. But, like I said, they would have to think I
was somebody important or I wouldn’t have the nerve to go to the opera in a
cotton dress. (both chuckle). Or they figured they must have thought I was the
governor’s wife or somebody or I wouldn’t be sitting there in the Diamond
Horseshoe with those other ladies in their black velvet and me in that good-
lookin’ cotton dress from Lord and Taylor’s.

Junge: Well, for a lady from Hiland you’ve really gotten out to see a bit of the world.

Evenson: Yes. I really did. That was one thing—and I sure made it count. Every
minute that I was away I never passed up an opportunity to do something
exciting and different if I possibly could.

Junge: It took a lot of guts, didn’t it? Most women weren’t like you.

Evenson: Yeah. There’s hardly anybody I know that would have had the temerity to do
the things I did. They’ll say, “How did you ever do that?” (laughs). Oh, I
don’t know, it just seemed like—

Junge: You weren’t going to miss out, were you?

Evenson: No, I paid my money and I was going to see the show. (laughs). I had these certain things I wanted to do, and I wanted to find out about 'em and I wanted to know about 'em and so—

Junge: Isn't it amazing who you run into when you get away? You talk about meeting somebody in Macy's or something like that.

Evenson: Yeah, wasn't that something? The ladies from Lander. Mm-hmm.

Junge: Everybody's got a story like that, Betty. Do you realize that I've got a story like that? Our family met a family from Sheridan on the corner of Hollywood and Vine. (both laugh) I wonder if everybody doesn't have a story like that.

Evenson: I imagine they do. Mm-hmm.

Junge: But it's a small world, isn't it?

Evenson: Yes, it really is.

Junge: Well, can we talk a little bit about your writing?

Evenson: Okay.

Junge: Okay. When did you first get interested in writing?

Evenson: Oh, I always thought I could write. That was part of my—'course I am pretty conceited. That's one thing about this other business we were talking about.

A lot of my courage was probably because I was conceited. I am pretty conceited.

Junge: Do you think so?

Evenson: I kinda' think so. But I always thought I could write. 'Course I got my ears knocked down a lot on that. I found out I wasn't near as good as I thought I was. But, anyhow, I always thought I could write really well.

Junge: Tell me about those.

Evenson: Well, first when I was really young I just knew I was going to write books.

Now after I learned to read, I thought: “Now I’m going to write books that people are going to read.” And that was when I was five years old. So when I was about seven I wrote this book on a pencil tablet, on a “Big Chief” pencil tablet, about this little girl, Lydia, and her little sister, Hazel, and how she went to the farm to see these baby chicks. And she picked up this baby chick in her hand, and she squeezed it and it died. She squeezed it to death. And the little girl started to cry, and she looked up at her big sister and she said, “But I only meant to love it.” And, oh, I thought that was the best punch line I had ever heard anywhere. I thought that was the ending to end all endings.

Junge: (Chuckles)

Evenson: I’d say that over to myself at night after I went to bed. I’d say, “But I only meant to love it.” Oh, I thought that was such a good story. (laughs).

Anyhow, when I was in high school I always got good grades in English, and I wrote themes and they weren’t very good but I thought they were. And I guess the other kids’ were worse, because I always got the best grades in class.

(laughs). They weren’t really too good. But then I wasn’t a very original writer, was one of my problems. In fact, I don’t think I am an original writer now.

Junge: What do you mean by that?

Evenson: I mean, I just tell about little things—. The reason my book is as good as it is, is because I just tell about things that really happened and how I thought about

them. I don't tell about something completely imaginary that I have to—you know, it seems like I have to have something to base it on.

So then after I got married I decided the time had come for me to seriously start to write. So I write all these stories for these—oh, for everything. I wrote stories that I thought were good enough for the *Saturday Evening Post* and the *Atlantic Monthly* and *Harper's*, and all those really classy magazines, you know. I'd send them away. They'd send them back, of course. I got so many rejection slips that I papered the side wall of our outside potty with my rejection slips. They made a very colorful collage, you know. They made a good conversation piece. (both chuckle) Different colors, you know. Green for *Good Housekeeping* and pale grey for *Atlantic Monthly*. Anyhow, so then it began to come to me that maybe I wasn't a very good writer. I wasn't writing well enough for those magazines. Because I was writing stories about—love stories about things that I knew absolutely nothing about. I wrote about this girl (that) had gone to Bermuda. I didn't even know where Bermuda was, to tell you the honest truth, exactly. She was on a ship and she had this romance. Then I wrote another one about a romance in the country club and had never been inside a country club, nor even seen one from the outside, I don't think. So, what I knew about the social lives of people in the country club was pretty nil. So finally, in despair, I saw an ad in the *Writer's Digest*. So I sent one of my stories to a critic, and he wrote back and he said, "The only thing I can think that your stories would be any good for would be the confession market. Well, I considered that a bitter blow, you know. I thought:

“My goodness” ‘cause, as I said, I was a **snob—you** know, a real literary snob. But then I got to thinking and I thought: “Well, if that’s all I can do, then that’s all I can do. I’m going to get in there in some way and if I have to come in by the back door, I’ll come in by the back door.” So, I came to town and bought all **the** confession magazines that were on sale at the newsstand and I had never read one before—never even seen one **hardly. Read ‘em all. Started** writing **‘em. And** it was the fifth one I **wrote and** it was “I was a Piker.” And I got forty-five dollars for it and I sold it to *Personal Romances*.

Junge: What was it about?

Evenson: It was about a lady that wouldn’t go out to sheep camp. See, I finally decided to use a background I knew something about, which it never occurred to me when I was writing the other stories, that I could use Hiland for my background. (chuckles) I didn’t think it was exciting enough. So she wouldn’t go out to sheep camp with her husband. They had a house in town and she wanted to stay in town because she liked her bridge parties and everything. And he was going out for lambing, and she wouldn’t go out to sheep camp with him during lambing and stay in the sheep wagon. So, of course, he got tick fever and nearly **died. So** she was very regretful [though] her being with him wouldn’t have made a darn bit of difference whether that tick bit him or not, whether she was there or not. But that was a minor matter and nobody paid any attention to a reasonable thing like that. (both chuckle) The editors didn’t seem to mind it either.

Junge: I see. How did you feel when you sold that first one?

Evenson: Oh, I was in seventh heaven. I just couldn't believe that I—I didn't cash that check for a long, long time. It was so wonderful. I just couldn't believe I'd actually made forty-five dollars.

Junge: Did you tell anybody?

Evenson: Oh, yes, I told everybody I saw about it. You know me. I'm not the shy, retiring type. (both laugh) But I don't know if my husband ever read it or not. He was not one much to read my work. He didn't think much of it.

Junge: Well, what was the opinion of those closest to you—like your husband, your mother and father—about this work?

Evenson: Oh, I never heard mother say anything about it. It was after Daddy had died that I sold it, so I never heard Daddy's viewpoint on it. Mama, I can't think what she said. I don't think she said much of anything. She probably didn't think much of it. She was pretty—and Maurice, I don't think, said anything about it one way or the other.

Junge: But this was a goad for you to do more.

Evenson: Yeah. I was going to make some money. I was going to make some money or else. Well then, in the meantime while I was writing the confession~~s~~ I also wrote a bunch of little Sunday school stories that were, like, for teenage Sunday school papers. And they were nice little stories that were kind of cute. But, you know, you only got paid six or seven dollars for those, so that wasn't so much of a temptation to write those.

Junge: Where did you get your ideas?

Evenson: Oh, from everything that happened. Everything that happened I got an idea from. I remember one Sunday School story I went out to watch them put up hay at a ranch out there close and that gave me the idea for that. And one of my confessions I went to the **Ice Capades**. It wasn't called that then, but it was an ice skating thing and I got an idea for a confession from that. Everywhere I went I got an idea for a story and every person that came in, **practically**. **The** world was just full of ideas for stories if you really—

Junge: People would come in?

Evenson: Uh-huh. If you're really looking for story **ideas**. **And** that **(Hiland)** was a wonderful place to have story ideas because people talked to **you, because** lots of times they were the only ones in there, over their coffee, or salesmen or somebody would talk to you. You can use it. I used a lot of things that happened in my own family 'cause not too many of them read very many of my stories.

Junge: Did you get ideas from truck drivers, bus drivers?

Evenson: Uh-huh. Yeah. Sure did. This one bus driver sure got **mad** at me (laughs). I used one of his—I made up the situation pretty much, but I used—he was the worst philanderer in the **world, that** guy was. He was something else. I remember I asked him once, I said, “Well, how many women do you think you've had in your life?” “Oh, my God,” he said. “I don't know but how could you ask me a thing like that?” And I said, “Well, don't you have some idea?” And he said, “Well, you know that's an occupational hazard when you have to stay all night at the other end of the line.” So I said, “Well, would it be

like ten, or would it be like twenty or would it be like two hundred?” He said, “Oh my, I’ve been driving for twenty years. It’s probably more like two hundred.” (laughs) He was honest. He was being honest. But, anyhow, what he got mad at me about was because I had told this story and I did have a pretty good picture of him in it, you know, a good description of him. His wife was a schoolteacher and I didn’t think she’d ever see it, but then she picked up a copy of the magazine in the beauty parlor, and it happened to have a picture of a bus driver on the front of it, and so she was intrigued by it and read the article. She thought it sounded kinda’ suspiciously like him. (both laugh) Of course, she couldn’t prove it. But he said, “Yeah, that Betty,” he said, “Sure, she says just tell me anything, it’s just like talking to a priest or a doctor. It’s all confidential,” he said, “and then the next thing you know it’s splashed all over the front page of some magazine. (both laugh)

Junge: Well, what was the upshot of all this?

Evenson: Oh, nothing. I mean, she couldn’t prove it was him but he just lied his way out of it. He was a pretty good liar, I imagine. If he’d had two hundred women, he was probably a pretty good liar by that time. (laughs).

Junge: You know, it’s interesting. I’m just trying to picture somebody sitting there at the counter while you’re making a ham sandwich telling you about an affair he had.

Evenson: The bus drivers got to be really close friends of ours. They were just like members of the family ‘cause they would come in and help make coffee, and help serve the customers, and help us with everything because, you see, during

the war when we had those great big busloads we'd have, like, two sections on each bus and the busses met there at two o'clock in the afternoon. So that would mean four busloads and they would all be loaded. So that would mean about one-hundred fifty or two-hundred people all there at once. But they stayed a long time 'cause, you see, that was during the war and they were supposed to keep a real—you know, not go very fast. But they said it ruined the motors on the busses to go that slow, so they'd just go at regular speed and spend the rest of that time at Hiland. So they got to be real good friends of ours. I just loved all the bus drivers. They were real good friends and Christy was real good—they loved Christy too. They thought she was great.

Junge: After this first one that you sold, that was an incentive for you to do more.

Evenson: Yes, I wrote them all the time then.

Junge: So, can you tell me how many?

Evenson: Oh, I suppose probably—I don't know, I wrote quite a lot but, of course, I didn't sell all of them. But I would imagine I probably sold about fifty or sixty or maybe seventy. I don't know. I didn't have all of them because I didn't always get a copy of the magazine.

Junge: How many did you write totally do you think?

Evenson: Oh, I suppose I wrote about one hundred. I think I sold—I sold the majority because once I got started writing, I began to get on to the style real well. They really began to get on to the fact that I was contributing. Now after I sold about two or three to *True Story*, then I could almost sell them anything I wrote because they were familiar with me. They knew who I was then, see, and even

though your name doesn't appear on any of the stories—see, that's the reason you can get by with writing all these things, you see. You don't have any byline.

Junge: No byline?

Evenson: So you don't get any credit but you don't get any discredit, either.

Junge: So who did you submit to then, you said *True Story*?

Evenson: Yes, well I didn't sell to *True Story* for quite a while. It was one of the top markets.

Junge: Still?

Evenson: Well, I mean in that field, in the confession field *True Story* is the best market. And I sold to *Personal Romances*, and *Modern Romances*, and *True Confessions*, and *True Love* and I sold a lot of them to *Personal Romances*. So there were several others—*Secrets* or something like that. I can't remember.

Junge: Were you getting a reputation?

Evenson: As a confession writer? Yes, I think I would have if I had kept on a little more with it, but after—about the time that I began to get on to it then I didn't need the money so bad and I just didn't do as much of it, you know. I wrote a novel and I got so entranced with writing the novel that I just didn't write any confessions for a little while then.

Junge: What happened to the novel?

Evenson: Well, it just never did sell at all although it was really a pretty good book I thought. I sure wish I could have sold it. If I'd have sold it at the time I first wrote it, it would have been fine because now it's out of date. It's too—. But

it was about a town like Hiland and it was really basically a love story. But it took these people—everybody in this little area, the ranchers and people in the town—through a big blizzard from New Year's Day to the Fourth of July in this little town.

TAPE 2, SIDE A

Junge: Okay. Well, I was going to ask you about this formula. You said that there was a way that you wrote these, a formula. Now what is that?

Evenson: Well, the general formula is sin, suffer and repent. But the way they say that you're supposed to write 'em is: first you tell them what you're going to say, and then you say it, and then you tell them what you did say so that they can't possibly miss the point. It's a little bit like the news commentators telling you on the President's speech, First they tell you what he's gonna' say, then he says it, and then they tell you what he did say. (both laugh)

Junge: Well now, tell me more about this sin, suffer and repent.

Evenson: One thing that changed a lot during the period that I was writing confessions from the beginning, like in 1935 or whenever it was I sold my first confession until 1965, or '70 or something like that when I gave up on writing 'em, they're much more liberal with their sinning now than they were then. I mean, boy, you know they didn't allow any sinning at all hardly in the first thing. They didn't allow very much.

Junge: Nothing explicit.

Evenson: No, really. Confession magazines are really not terribly explicit. They may be more so now. I haven't been reading them lately but when I was writing them they were not explicit anything like the modern novels of today, not anything like as explicit as that. Now, you see, they allowed them—I think in about the '60s they started to allow them to live together without being married, without considering it a sin, but they had to be committed to each other, you see. They couldn't do it casually. It was a sin. They couldn't be promiscuous but they had to be sincere or whatever. But, you know, in the first place they were really severe about—any kind of sexual slipping from grace was pretty harsh. I mean, that you didn't describe it in detail at all.

Junge: That was *verboden*.

Evenson: Yeah. You just, you know, you just said, like, “Oh, darling. We were alone in the deserted mountain cabin.” He pulled me close. “Oh, darling I've waited so long for this night,” And his lips touched mine. And then there's some dots and it says, “The next morning dawned bright and clear.” (both laugh)

Junge: I see.

Evenson: Kind of that idea.

Junge: Did you like it that way or would you have preferred some other—

Evenson: No, I preferred to write like my novel when I could write it the way it really was. I liked that. I liked my novel. It was really pretty good. It was about, really, basically the love affair between this rancher who had married a woman he didn't really love because he had to marry her because he got her pregnant

at a Sunday School picnic. (laughs) And the woman he met afterwards that he had to give up because he couldn't desert his family.

Junge: Mm-hmm. Were most of these, Betty, conjured up in your mind, or did you have a little piece of information to go on?

Evenson: Most of these had a little bit of information.

Junge: Basis in fact.

Evenson: Like the true confession that I wrote where the husband told me the one story, and the wife came along and told me another story and I wrote up another story from her point of view. The same couple. I knew 'em both.

Junge: Did people as far away as Casper and other towns look down on you for doing this?

Evenson: Oh, kind of. Yeah, I would say that they did. I don't know. Like my writing class. People in the writing class didn't because people that have really tried to write know it's hard to write no matter what you write. If you work hard at it, it's a hard job no matter what. But they kind of, I don't know, they mostly just—I was trying to think of whether they did or not. I really don't know whether they did or not.

Junge: Did you take any kidding?

Evenson: Yeah, especially the men saying, "Oh, you write confessions." And then at the press conventions they'd say, "I suppose some of them are taken from your own experiences?" I'd say, "Yeah, most of 'em but, of course, I have to clean them up a little before I can send them in." (both laugh) Like I said to this man in New York City that was at a bar. I knew you weren't supposed to sit at

the bar in New York City but there weren't enough tables in that hotel where I was staying so I went in for a nightcap and I was talking to this other lady next to me. I was telling her I lived in Wyoming and he looked at me with this frigid look and he said, "In New York City, ladies don't sit at the bar." And I said, "Oh, what a shame. How do they ever pick up any men?" (both laugh) The look he gave me could have chilled you.

Junge: Now, you did achieve a certain amount of publicity or notoriety, whatever you want to call it, for being from such a little town and a pretty famous author.

Evenson: Yes, that's true.

Junge: I mean, people have associated you with that kind of thing.

Evenson: Yes.

Junge: Do you think it's fair?

Evenson: Oh, I don't mind. It's okay. I don't care.

Junge: Now tell me a little bit about the shows that you appeared on.

Evenson: Oh, yes. The Phil Donahue show. He didn't really like the idea that my stories were being published when some of the good magazines were going under like *Life* and some of those. He was very critical of my stories.

Junge: Now, you're sure he wasn't just trying to be a devil's advocate?

Evenson: I don't really know. He's a funny guy. He's kinda' different now than he was then. That was kind of a long time ago. He was in Toronto—was it Toronto, Ohio?

Junge: Dayton.

Evenson: Dayton, Ohio. Yes, that's it. He was in Dayton then. He out and out said he didn't approve of the stories but he wasn't nasty to me, particularly, personally and—

Junge: What did he see wrong?

Evenson: Well, he just said that—I was trying to think. Well, mostly the people in the audience did most of the talking against the stories. One lady, she just said that anybody that wrote those kind of stories must surely have a sick mind and another lady in the audience said, “You heard Betty talk. Does she sound like she's sick to you? She sounds like she's having a ball and having a great time out of life.” (laughs) But, anyhow, after that to the other lady I said, “Well, if you don't like them, why do you read them?” And she said, “Well, they're in the beauty parlor and that's all that they have in there to read sometimes.” I said, “Well, you could just sit and look into space.” (laughs)

Junge: Sure. You know, thinking about it now, I would ask that same question. Let me ask it of you. Why do people read confession magazines?

Evenson: Well, I think they read them because they can identify with them a lot. And some of the stories in them are really good, as a matter of fact, especially later on after they cut out all the fiction, you see, out of—after they cut out *Colliers* and, oh, what are some of those others?

Junge: *Saturday Evening Post*.

Evenson: Uh-huh. All of those others that used stories. There was no stories anymore in any magazines except the confessions and some of those writers that wrote for those didn't have to prostitute their art because they didn't have to sign their

names. So some of the stories were exceptionally good and I could just about pick out some of the stories that were written by people who were real writers, you know, just to keep the pot boiling, you know—a couple hundred dollars wouldn't be bad. They probably got more than that. I'd get two hundred dollars from *True Stories*. They probably got five hundred dollars if they were well-known writers. So some of the stories weren't bad. Some of my stories weren't bad. Really, they weren't. I got better at 'em as time went on and I thought really—one of the last ones that I wrote was one I wrote when I came to town that I got the inspiration for from church. It was about the only thing I did when I'd come to town was go to church. But, anyhow, I got this idea because the minister's daughter had had a baby and they announced it from the pulpit. They always announced when a new baby—she didn't live here but I could just see all the women mentally calculating and it wasn't long enough from the time that she'd been married, see. So, I got this idea about how the mother must be feeling sitting up there in the choir with all the women down there kind of condemning her, you know. So I wrote it from her point of view, and how she must have felt and how she felt so, kind of angry at the people and everything. And then how as she sat there and looked at the other people, and she saw the kindest man that was passing the communion plate—looked at her with these kind eyes—and then she saw this woman who had a little handicapped, a little half-witted child and she thought how she would love to have a child of any kind that was born that was right. And several other little instances like that. And then that was the way she—and so, when she got up to

sing it was an Easter background^d, and they were singing the Easter anthem and she thought she really appreciated the gift of life or something like that. So it was really quite a , you know, there wasn't nothing trashy about the story whatsoever except just the fact that this woman had this child too soon after she was—

Junge: Well, you changed you mind, didn't you? You were a little kid when you thought these things were real trashy to adulthood.

Evenson: Yeah. Well, the reason I thought they were trashy, one reason was that I had never read any of them. So all my decisions were—but I do think they improved as time went on. As I say, better writers were writing for 'em.

Junge: Did you try to put a moral into your stories?

Evenson: Yeah. They almost always have to have a moral, yeah. The moral on that one, of course, was she appreciated the fact that she had this new grandchild instead of feeling ashamed about the other.

Junge: Now, Betty, do you think that ^{real-life} situations are more intense than what you can actually fabricate?

Evenson: ^{Oh, yeah}, I really do.

Junge: I think you mention something like that in your book that you felt that you couldn't write it like it really was.

Evenson: I think the reason I like to write confessions now that I think more ^{about} it is because they are emotional. They deal with ^{emotions}. ^{That's} really their basic thing and that's why I'm good at writing them because I like to write about emotions 'cause I'm an incurable ^{romantic}. ^{And} that's the reason I did well in

that kind of writing because I wasn't a good enough writer, really, to write probably for a better market, although I do think that book was good and I almost sold it. I sent it to an agent in New York, a very, very fine agent. He was Peggy Curry's **agent, and** he took it for her sake and he sent it to Crowell Publishing **Company. And** a friend of mine knew somebody who worked for the Crowell Publishing Company and she said they almost took **it** but they had to be unanimous. They had five editors and four liked **it** but one didn't.

Junge: Crowell. How do you spell that?

Evenson: Yeah, it **was—**. **Let** me see, was it Crowell or was it? It's something that begins with—did I say Crowell? Well, anyhow, I think that's the way it is. Maybe they aren't a publishing company anymore. They were a good publishing company.

Junge: C-r-o-w-e-l-l, Crowell?

Evenson: Uh-huh. I think so. They were a publishing house then anyhow.

Junge: What did you call the novel?

Evenson: "No Man's Guilt." And the little thing in the front was a quote from William Saroyan: "Remember that no man's guilt is his alone nor his innocence a thing apart." Because it was about how all these people's lives hinged upon each other and the circumstances that were behind each of these lives.

Junge: Was that a disappointment to you?

Evenson: Oh, terrible. That was a bitter, bitter disappointment to me. It took me a long time to get over that.

Junge: Why was it?

Evenson: Because I thought it was really good and I wanted it to be read. I wanted the world to read it. In fact, it was more—but I think it was because I was younger and more intense in my feelings then than I am now, because I just wanted it to be a success worse than I did the one that is a success now.

Junge: It wasn't the same to have a novel published as it was to have an article published.

Evenson: To me the novel—well, you see, the novel was me. The novel was really my ideas, and my feelings and my—it was all put into other people's minds and thoughts, you know. It wasn't like the *"Fifty Years at the Bright Spot"* where it was really just-flat out my ideas. It had so much—it had such good characterization in it. I had some fabulous characters in it and they were so true to life. I remember one time I was reading it at the writers' class and I said something about how the little girl's mother said, "Well, you don't need to dress up for school today. Go wear that half-dirty, blue dress that you wore on Tuesday." Or something like that. They were all horrified. They said, "Oh, nobody would send their child to school with a dress that was half-dirty." And I said, "You don't know what people are like. (chuckles)"

Junge: Yeah, right.

Evenson: But I did like that book. I thought it was good but the sad part of it is the one editor who didn't like it was a woman. The others were men and they would have accepted it.

Junge: You said in your book that you understand men's feelings.

Evenson: I think I do understand men's feelings better than women's sometimes.

Junge: Why?

Evenson: Women puzzle me **sometimes**. I don't know. I don't know how to describe it, exactly, but I notice that all the stories that I wrote for the confessions that were from a man's point of view always sold. Because there weren't very many of those. They didn't hardly have many from a man's point of view.

Junge: This book that you've written recently, *Fifty Years at the Bright Spot*, how do you place that book in the total perspective of your writing. I mean, is it important?

Evenson: Yes, it is important. It's important to me now more because of the other people involved in it and in my life, I believe. Like for my family or for my grandchildren and my great-grandchildren to come, maybe. I think it's kind of important as a way of life for people. I don't feel it as a personal triumph so much as I would if I'd have published that novel, for instance, but I feel it was something that I ought to do and I was glad I did. I'm real happy that I did it.

Junge: Maybe the novel was the artist in you and this is the educator in you.

Evenson: That might be. That could be. And I think possibly—well, it just depends.

Well, I was going to say maybe I was a better writer when I wrote the novel but I don't believe that's really true because I believe I am a better writer now, because I know better what to leave out and what to leave in. But there are places in the book that I should have put in a different place. I can see now that I've got it finished that I should—

Junge: What bothers you about it?

Evenson: Oh, some of the incidents should have been placed in a different location to make it more smooth, to make it fit together better.

Junge: But isn't that the way that every writer feels after it's all over with?

Evenson: Oh, I suppose.

Junge: You should have done this, you should have done that.

Evenson: Yeah. I am really real pleased that it has had such a wonderful reception. I just can't get over how—this lady that I don't even know, really, came in the other day. She had bought four books the other day, and she came back and bought four more and she said, "This book should be given to every young person in the country," she said, "just to show them how life was like back in those days." (chuckles)

Junge: Uh-huh. Do you ever get the impression that people feel they know you now better even though you don't know them as well?

Evenson: Yes, I kinda' think that's true. Mm-hmm. Many people have said that reading the book has been just like sitting down talking to me.

Junge: Yes. I can understand that. That's how I felt when I read it. I think it's the storyteller in you.

Evenson: Well, probably, maybe so.

Junge: I think you are a good storyteller.

Evenson: Well, I don't know. I just thought I would just like to talk about myself. I think I am so egotistical I just like to talk about myself. I think everybody likes to do that.

Junge: Well, I think with everybody it's the main subject of interest.

Evenson: Yeah, well I guess maybe some can't put it into words as easy. Maybe that's the situation.

Junge: I think that's where the talent lies and I think you picked that up from your dad.

Evenson: Yeah, I probably did. I probably did take it somewhat from him.

Junge: You know, I think you're an educator, Betty. I just get this impression—everything you've said here about this bright spot in the road—“*Fifty Years at the Bright Spot*”—it seems to me that you're saying “I want to leave something,” and I got this impression reading the book. “I want to leave something for my kids, grandkids and their kids.”

Evenson: Yes, well, I do kinda' feel that way, like you shouldn't have lived in vain completely. It seems like you should have something that the world will remember about you.

Junge: A product.

Evenson: Mm-hmm.

Junge: Yeah, but it seems to me, especially when you spend so much time on Christy—your daughter, Christy—it seemed to me that you were almost saying, “Look here. This is for you.”

Evenson: Yeah, it really is, probably.

Junge: I mean, not that the book wasn't—I found the book fascinating. For a local author running local stuff—Hiland, Wyoming—it really had a lot in it. It had a whole life in there that was connected to other places outside of Hiland. But when you got to Christy and you started talking about her and her birthdays,

and so forth, and her this and her that, I got the impression that you were trying to say to her, “Look, this is a little gift for you,” you know. “I want you to know how you were and how important you were to me.”

Evenson: That’s probably true.

Junge: Well, I don’t mean to put words in your mouth, of course, but that’s the impression I got reading it. Did you write that play that you presented to the Historical Society?

Evenson: No, my sister wrote it, but I helped her write it. I wrote a part of ~~it~~ but she wrote the majority of it.

Junge: Which sister?

Evenson: ~~Faye—Faye Edgar—the~~ one that’s still living. She’s eighty-six years old.

Junge: Did she read that part?~~?~~—I mean when you two read it in front of the Historical Society here?

Evenson: No, we didn’t read it. We recited ~~it~~. I mean it was like a play.

Junge: She wrote that?

Evenson: Uh-huh.

Junge: So she has a talent for writing.

Evenson: Oh, yes, she’s a beautiful writer. She’s a much better writer than I ~~am~~ but she’s not prolific. She only writes a little tiny bit and she doesn’t just go all out with her writing~~g~~ but she writes beautiful poetry. She’s a poet.

Junge: Who came up with that idea to do this?

Evenson: About the prostitutes?

Junge: Mm-hmm.

Evenson: We were asked to do a program at the Fine Arts Club about the early days of prostitution in Casper and Faye came up with the idea of making that little play out of it and, boy, she really is good at things. I wrote parts of it and I kind of roughed it up a little bit, you know. I made a few **more—I** don't know what you'd say **exactly—but**, you know, a little tougher talk and took some of the more literary terms out of it that she had in it.

Junge: This was about life on the—

Evenson: Sandbar.

Junge: Sandbar, yeah.

Evenson: It was really interesting because it was really not at all what you'd think it would **be. Because** it showed these two women as being human beings who really had a lot of interesting things and lives that were the same as anybody else would have, you know.

Junge: Yeah. Do you feel that people maybe get misjudged a lot?

Evenson: Yeah, I expect. I expect they do because I'm sure I was misjudged a lot at Hiland, because I think a lot of people thought that I lived a real desolate life.

Junge: Mm-hmm.

Evenson: That was maybe one reason, too, that I wanted to write the book. I kinda' wanted to prove what a good life it was. I was really very fortunate. I'm so glad that it all really worked out so well, that we had the big family gathering for it last summer. It was just really fabulous. My autograph party was just something else, I tell you. We had two hundred people a there and we had **third-hand**, ham sandwiches. We wanted to make the ham sandwiches, but we

couldn't do **that**. **So** Christy had told them that they had to have just ham and bread, absolutely nothing else and we were going to bring the relish and the mustard. **And** I said to the man that was arranging it, "Don't have mayonnaise on 'em because, you know, I say in the book I don't like mayonnaise." Well, I'll be damned, when I got there if they didn't all have mayonnaise and lettuce on 'em. (both laugh) So poor Christy, she was really upset about **that**. **But** anyhow we had a fabulous party, and then afterwards we had a family gathering at my sister Faye's house and we had relatives from all over. I tell you, they really did me proud. My nephew from Dallas came, my niece from Los Angeles came, and one of my nephews who had just graduated from West Point and lives in Florida, he came. So, I really had all kinds of people from hither and yon. Some people from Colorado and Montana.

Junge: Were you the life of the party?

Evenson: I was autographing books all the time. (laughs) No, I really wasn't much of the life of the party because by the time I got through autographing books I was pretty well tired out to tell you the truth. (laughs).

Junge: Yeah. Are you still writing?

Evenson: Not much. I've kinda' come upon a real—I think partly what has made me really sort of give up on everything has been my sister Joyce's death in October, you see, and I just haven't quite got over that enough to try to write anything. Oh, I write ideas and theories and things I think about. I just pick up a notebook and write some little notions or ideas. But I'd like to write another little book of just little odds and ends of little, kinda' essays or ideas or kinda'

like a column would be in a newspaper, you know. 'Cause I can think of all kinds of things I'd like to talk about, hold forth on.

Junge: Things just off the top of your head?

Evenson: Yeah, just anything that comes up, you know, like things like the Persian Gulf and things that are just happening or things that are different from what they were when I was **young—different** things that aren't in the books.

Junge: Do you have strong feelings about the Persian Gulf War?

Evenson: Well, I have uncomfortable feelings about it. I mean, I think it's wonderful that we got it won so fast, but I think there's something behind the scenes that I don't know about and I feel kinda' uncomfortable about it.

Junge: Something behind the scenes?

Evenson: I think so. I just can't get away from that. I know that's silly to say but I know that—just to be sure of an election is not worth putting all that through. I just can't figure it out. There's something more there than meets the eye and I betcha before my children die it'll be found out but I'll never know it. I'll die before then. But I just can't help but think there's something because this business about how virtuous we are and about this morality business, it's just like somebody said on TV the other night that Bush was so chummy, chummy with the Syrians that he was rather selective with his morality, which is really true. There's all kinds of other places we could have been just as apt to defend as we did Kuwait. There's something somewhere. I don't know what it is, but it bothers me just a little **bit. But** I am so glad that it came to such a swift end.

Junge: I feel like you do. I feel the same way. I think there's something there that's bothering me. I wonder if it's bothering other Americans.

Evenson: Well, you know, you don't say much about it or else you're accused of being anti-American, which is not true at all.

Junge: Well, like last night—as long as we're on this subject, we'll just let this roll—. But was it last night or the night before?—some lady was commenting, some news person. Maybe she was an anchor somewhere on some station, but she was commenting about the people who protested in San Francisco and how that was terrible. And San Francisco, of course, is getting a black eye, which the mayor and everybody knows because people don't want to visit there. They're canceling their conventions or what have you. I just caught a little piece of what this lady was saying but she seemed to indicate that the San Franciscans were involved in almost treasonous activity, and I said to myself: “Well, what are we supposed to do, take the City of San Francisco out in the morning and shoot ‘em?” I mean, don't we have a right of free speech? I thought: “That's what makes this country great. It's not the military.”

Evenson: That's right. That's what we're supposed to be fighting for.

Junge: That's what I thought.

Evenson: But I just don't get what this was all about because, you know, in the first place when we first moved all these 400,000 troops over there nothing at all was said about how we had to be noble and to do this for the sake of humanity and all this stuff. But then that came up afterwards and now it's been tooted loudly. And you were very anti-American if you didn't think everything was

just ducky-lucky with it. And we were very fortunate that not any more men were killed than were.

Junge: But, you know, I get it from your book that you are a patriotic person.

Evenson: Yeah, I really am. I really am by nature.

Junge: You talk about the flag being raised at Hiland.

Evenson: I always have been, but I will admit I have been pretty upset about this because I just don't feel that it's—

Junge: It's not quite kosher, is it?

Evenson: No, there's something wrong somewhere. There's something wrong and there's something about that whole deal that has bothered me all the time. There's something false somewhere. There's something phony.

Junge: Well, do you think that since you started ~~writing—going~~ way back to your first confession story back in 1935—do you feel that you have learned a lot about the human character?

Evenson; Oh, yeah, I think writing does help you because you delve into it more than you would if you weren't writing about things. I think it's more in my nature. I don't know whether it was because I'm a writer, or whether I'm a writer because of it. It's my nature (phone interruption). But I do think it's part of my nature to just want to probe into, not necessarily with them knowing it, but into why people do things and what motivates them and why they think the way they do. I just like to know about people. I just have an insatiable interest. I don't think it's curiosity, really, because I care about it. I think it's just an interest in what makes people tick. I just like to know about people.

Junge: And do you think that's the better part of confessions articles?

Evenson: Yeah, I think the better part of them is that they take hold of some problem somebody may have. It isn't very sophisticated or anything and it might even help them because I got a lot of letters from people who read the stories. They would send them to the magazine and the magazine would send them to me because they didn't have any address for me, of course, or name, even a name. And they would say things like, "Tell the author of *Weekend Love* that she saved my marriage. I wouldn't go out with my husband when he was on a construction job, just like Jenny wouldn't go with hers and then after I read your story I went and we've been so much happier ever since." Or something like that. So that kinda' makes you wonder if maybe you do do some good somewhere along the line.

Junge: That would make you feel good.

Evenson: Uh-huh, it really does.

Junge: Do you think that confession magazines and articles generally have been maligned unfairly?

Evenson: I kinda' think a little. I think that they're not as edifying but, really, they're just as edifying as some of the other so-called better writing, I think. Of course, I don't know. I really don't read enough recently because my eyes are so bad, but I can't see except in big print books and I can only read a short time on those. But I just think that some of the things in them are not near as bad as people say they are, I don't know, or they weren't when I was reading them. I'm going to say it that way 'cause I really don't know what they're like now

but I imagine they're similar. They do have a good moral even if they don't turn out happily. They kind of turn out right and I think that makes people feel kinda' good. I don't think that's necessarily the way life does. Now, for instance, on that very same story, that *Weekend Love*, if I'd have been writing it like it really was, that man was tickled pea green that his wife wasn't out there. He had an affair with a school teacher while he was there that was just wonderful. He had the time of his life. He didn't care if his wife was there or not. But, you see, (laughs) I couldn't put that in the confession. You see, that's the sort of thing that you can't put in the confession whereas you could have put it in another kind of a story, in *Redbook* or something (chuckles).

Junge: Who do you think your audience was, Betty?

Evenson: You'd be surprised. The audience is bigger than you think. I think they say that the audience is basically blue-collar workers' wives. I would say like beauty parlor operators and lots of college kids. You'd be surprised 'cause they used to come in and buy them from the store when I had magazines in the store, college kids. Young married people that aren't terribly busy. Most of the young married people now don't have time to read that sort of thing 'cause they're working and got kids to take care of too, but I think back in the days when women were home more—.

Junge: Did you sell these magazines that you wrote articles for in your store?

Evenson: Yeah. But most of the time I didn't have many stories in them after I started to sell 'em 'cause it was just toward the last that I sold magazines, and I was then working on that novel and didn't have many of my stories in.

Junge: I wonder if there were magazines in your store that you had articles in yourself.

Evenson: Well, there were not many. I think once or twice there was one that had mine in it but mostly I had pretty well quit writing for them by the time I had them in my store.

Junge: I would have been, as an author, bursting with pride wanting to tell somebody.

Evenson: Yeah, well I did like to tell somebody about it. You know there was lots of people that read 'em faithfully that were my friends that didn't read them ordinarily but just read the ones I wrote.

Junge: Do you think that one of the things that you maybe have wanted during your life is fame and success?

Evenson: Oh, yes, yes. I wanted fame very much. I wanted success and, really, I can't say that I haven't had it. Anytime that anybody goes on both "To Tell the Truth" and "The Phil Donahue" show, I mean, I guess—and on the front page of the *Wall Street Journal*—I guess probably I was more famous than a lot of people. I know a lot of people knew me after that *Wall Street Journal* than knew who the governor of Wyoming was, I'm sure.

Junge: (chuckles) How did you get picked for "To Tell the Truth"?

Evenson: That was through an article that was in the *Los Angeles Times*. A reporter came through. He was a roving reporter and he's kinda' finding little out-of-the-way places to write about so they called me. This lady that called me, she tickled me. She said kinda' hesitantly, "Well, have you ever been out of Hiland?" (laughs) She was going to give me instructions about how to get to New York City. I said, "Yeah, I've been to New York a couple of times."

Junge: How did they introduce you on the show?

Evenson: Well, I was supposed to be living in a town of one population and writing confession stories, so then they asked questions about it. (chuckles)

Junge: Now, how did that go? I can't remember.

Evenson: Well, you were asked the questions and you had to tell the truth but the other two contestants could lie about (it) if they wanted to. Like he asked this one lady—she was an artist that lived out on Fire Island out of New York City. She was a real elegant lady—and they asked her what a semi was and, of course, she hadn't the remotest idea. So that kinda' cancelled her out. And then the other one, I can't think what of the questions they asked her but I was fortunate I got all the kind of questions I could answer without any problem.

Junge: Were you nervous when you were on the show?

Evenson: No, that's one thing. I'm never nervous when I get up to make a talk or anything. I am beforehand, but once I get up and look people over then I'm not scared anymore.

Junge: Did you enjoy meeting some of the panelists?

Evenson: Yeah. It was really fun. What was it, Peggy Cass. They had this picture of the Bright Spot. That picture that's on the front of the book was a picture I took back there and they showed it on the screen, you know, without identification of any kind on it. Peggy Cass says, "Well, it didn't look like Wyoming to me 'cause there wasn't any mountains. I thought there was mountains everywhere in Wyoming. (chuckles) It was kinda' fun.

Junge: Did they treat you right?

Evenson: Yeah, they were pretty nice. Now “To Tell the Truth” didn’t pay me anything.

Well, neither one of them paid me anything, really, except prizes. But they paid my fare, of course. Phil Donahue gave me first class. That tickled me because between Denver and Chicago I was the only person in the first class section. (both laugh) I thought: “Boy, coming from a town of one and getting on the plane and being the only one in the first class section—.” (chuckles)

Junge: Well, how did the *Wall Street Journal* article come about?

Evenson: Well, he was another roving reporter. He just stopped to get gas, and then he came in and bought a sandwich and started asking me questions, and I started telling him everything I knew, of course. Boy, I can never live that down, though.

Junge: Is that right?

Evenson: ‘Cause I said I liked Wyoming just the way it was without any more people, and I liked it fine, and got my ideas for stories out of truck drivers and bus drivers. And I said, “Oh, yes, and a bar is a great place to get ideas for stories.” And so when he wrote the article he says, “So when she runs out of stories she goes into Casper sixty miles away and hangs around the bars.

(laughs) So the first time I came into town I went into the Ramada to get a drink after class and Chuck Smith, who was running it, says, “Oh, here’s that Betty out hanging around the bars again.” (laughs)

And then Phil McCauley—he was the editor of the *Tribune* then—he called me up and he says, “Say, old sport, how about meeting down at the Trail Bar

for a drink?” And the Trail Bar was the crummiest place in town. (both laugh)
I had a lot of fun out of that.

Junge: Well, I expect that was sort of unique to be on the front page of the—

Evenson: Oh, I'll say it was. My goodness. A man called me up from New Jersey that night and said, “Well, I don't expect you know it there yet, but you're on the front page of the *Wall Street Journal* and I just wanted to call you up and tell you.” He said, “I don't think very many people from Wyoming have had their name on the front page of the *Wall Street Journal*. I'm sure nobody from Hiland ever has” (laughs)

Junge: Doesn't that give you a bit of a kick?

Evenson: Oh, yeah.. That tickled me to death. I really liked that. I enjoyed that. That was a lot of fun.

Junge: You had had a reputation because I had heard about you and I think I read about you in an *Empire Magazine*.

Evenson: Yeah, I expect.

Junge: Wasn't there an *Empire Magazine* article?

Evenson: There probably was. I can't remember now.

Junge: The *Denver Post* Sunday supplement.

Evenson: I sold a couple of stories to them, too.

Junge: Zeke Scher used to be a writer for them. Maybe he was the one who talked to you.

Evenson: Yes, I think so. I think he did put something in it.

Junge: You really got a lot of publicity.

Evenson: Yeah, I really did in my life. I certainly can't say that I wasn't **well-known** for a person that lived in a little place like that. I really did pretty well.

Junge: Do people still come by and see you and talk with you about your publications?

Evenson: Oh, not much anymore.

Junge: Well, Betty, I'm going to ask you this. I've been thinking about asking you this. If you could come back here—let's say you were allowed to live another eighty, eighty-one years—what would you expect to find when you come back here to Hiland, to Casper, to Wyoming?

Evenson: I think it would be so different, I wouldn't hardly recognize it.

Junge: Do you?

Evenson: Mm-hmm.

Junge: Things haven't changed that much.

Evenson: No, but they will in the next eighty years.

Junge: Do you think so?

Evenson: They've changed quite a bit in eighty years. I think that there would be so much technology, **see**. I think that eighty years nobody will need to go anyplace, like to a concert because they'll just stay at home for 'em. They'll all be videoed, or whatever, into their **homes**. **And** I figure that there won't be any shopping **done**, or banking or anything 'cause they'll all be done by technology of some kind. All this technology, it's all stuff I don't quite understand **d** but I think it will just keep on getting more and more and stuff that

will be beyond me to imagine what it'll be like. I don't think I can even think of what it'll be like.

Junge: Do you think we'll have rural life like we knew it?

Evenson: I doubt it. I think everything will be run from a **big-name** thing somehow.

Junge: But, won't we always have long distances between Casper and Cheyenne?

Evenson: Maybe there'll be some kind of an automatic device that they can work from Casper to fill up cars or something. (both laugh) I don't know.

TAPE 2, SIDE B

Junge: Did I ask you if you kept a diary?

Evenson: Oh, yeah. I did keep—but through an awful lot of years I haven't, I didn't keep a good diary. I wish I had of. And then I kept some diaries and lost 'em and I kept diaries when I was younger and they were burned up in a **fire—that** fire we had at **Hiland—but** I didn't keep up with diaries. I've kept them since I've been here, but then there's nothing happened to me much since I've been here.

Junge: Well, it seemed to me that there was one point in your book that you referred to a diary**y**, that you couldn't tell Christy something because it was in a diary.

Evenson: Oh, yeah.

Junge: And I can't remember what that was **but**, anyway**y**, you had started some of **them**, anyway.

Evenson: Well, I know that I did write in diaries a lot. When I was in high school, especially, I was always writing in diaries.

Junge: Don't you think your writing improved (unintelligible)?

Evenson: Oh, yes, my writing was terrible when I was writing those stories for *Saturday Evening Post* and *Atlantic Monthly*, and I can't imagine how I had the courage, the nerve to send them out. It must have really tickled them to read 'em.

Junge: Who was that publisher that told you you should try *Confessions Magazine*?

Evenson: It think it was August Leninger. I think he was a critic, just a literary critic.

Junge: For?

Evenson: For just anybody. I mean, he just charged so much to criticize.

Junge: Oh, I see, so he told it like it was?

Evenson: Yeah and he was right. I was highly offended^d but he was right.

Junge: And that really gave you a boost.

Evenson: Yes. He was really responsible for my really becoming a writer 'cause probably I would have given it up if I had kept on with that other ^{tack}.

Junge: But you're a pretty determined lady.

Evenson: Oh, yeah, it's hard to discourage me when I get my mind made up. (both laugh)

Junge: Do you think that you are—let's use an old term—a “^Women's ^Libber”? Do you think you're that sort of person?

Evenson: Well, I think I kind of practiced it all my life without even being aware of it because I don't like the idea of men and women being alike. I don't like that idea at all, but I do think that women should have equal pay for what they ^{do}.

But I think women have in a lot of cases cut off their noses to spite their faces. I think that many of them are going to pay a bitter price for insisting on being equal because I think the poor souls, so many of them, they've done this and their husbands leave them, and then they're left with these little kids, and they've got to make a living and, really, I don't know, it seems like it's awful hard for 'em. And a lot of these career women—of course, most of my knowledge of women nowadays comes from the shows I see on TV so I don't really know what they're like— but these career women on TV seem to be pretty ruthless, cruel, as much so as any man ever was. And the thing I deplore nowadays that I don't like is, like on TV and in lots of movies and books, is that they are kind of reducing men to be stupid and kind of dumb, you know. Like “Oh, no, that isn't the way it is.” Like that commercial where that poor guy says, “Didn't we used to have Lysol soap, didn't Lysol soap used to have a disinfectant in it?” “No, it never did.” And that little kid says, “No, Dad, it didn't.” And I just want to slap those peoples' faces. I mean the way they—I don't like that because, I don't know, I like men awful well. I mean, I really like men and I can't, I just can't see why women, so many women, are setting themselves up to be so much smarter and so much better than men. I don't get it. I mean, there's smart men and there's smart women, there's good men and there's good women, there's bad men and there's bad women, but I don't think you can categorize them, lump them all together.

Junge: Well, Betty, wouldn't women come to you today and say, "You are a good example of the kind of women that this state ought to have. Independent, free-thinking, adventuresome.

Evenson: Probably, but you see, I always did it with the protection of my husband in the background. I was protected in a way that the women who **don't—I don't** know how to describe it exactly, because I was really, without knowing it, quite equal. I mean, I felt that I was equally able to run the store after a fashion. I wasn't as good as he was in some ways **s** so it was about even. Yeah, I suppose they would **d** but, really, down underneath in my heart I have a feeling that—I don't know, I think you ought to kinda' look up to a man. I don't know why. I just kinda' feel like that.

Junge: I'm going to poke at you a little bit here. Some women will come along and say, "You can't say something like that. That's an old-fashioned way to think."

Evenson: I know it **is** but, you see, I was born in an old-fashioned world.

Junge: (laughs) Okay.

Evenson: I think that **is** because it is old-**fashioned**. **But** I am that way. I don't think I'm very—I think I was kind of modern for my time, you **know—but** now I'm not very modern, I don't believe. I don't know what I am like now, I really don't. Because it seems like since I've—well, really, to be honest **t** and I don't know if we want to put this on any tape or anything, but it seems to me that since I have been unable to drive **e**, and unable to walk without the help of a walker or a cane and unable to go up and down steps **s** that I have ceased to be the same

person that I used to be. That it has taken—ill health takes something out of you that's really hard to—you're not quite the same ever again. So, it's hard for me to know what, exactly, I would be like if I were still a strong person, independent, who could do anything I want to, who, if I felt like it tonight I could just go out in the car and say, "Let's go down and have a drink," and just buzz down there and have a drink with you or something like that. It's just so different now. All I can do now is call up somebody and say, "Yes, I'd like to go to church and Sunday School if you'll stop and pick me up." And it just changes something in you very, very vitally. I mean, it's hard to—

Junge: But at least that gyroscope was started very early on. You had a good beginning in a way.

Evenson: Oh, yes. I had a wonderful life. I mean, I can't complain about this but I do think it might alter my thinking at this stage, about what I'm like now.

Junge: I understand.

Evenson: I've always felt like I—I don't know—I am trying to think about what I felt like in regard to my husband when I was younger. I got awful provoked at him mostly because he wasn't romantic and mostly because he didn't want to do the things that I wanted to do very much.

Junge: You were a little feistier. You had more energy.

Evenson: Yes, I did.

Junge: I notice that in myself, that your energy level as you grow older declines, and maybe you were more feisty and maybe you were more demanding—

Evenson: Yes, I probably was. I mean, I wasn't a very good wife, to tell you the honest truth, I don't think.

Junge: Don't you think?

Evenson: No, I don't think, I really don't. I was an interesting person, but I don't think he valued that so much as a good wife. I was a good wife to him when he got sick. He was sick for two years before he died.

Junge: What was his problem?

Evenson: He had a circulation problem, and he had arthritis real bad, and they gave him enormous doses of cortisone, which had just come in then, and it was just what really was too much for him in the end. Cortisone was deadly at first before they learned how to handle it, to do all these things with it.

Junge: So, it was a stroke?

Evenson: No, his circulation just quit. The blood just quit circulating through his body starting in with his feet and it just went up to his heart and quit.

Junge: What you're saying is that you've got certain regrets.

Evenson: No, I don't have any regrets about when he was sick at all 'cause I was a wonderful wife to him then. I took care of the store. I took care of him. I did everything I could for him, and I gave up all the things that I liked to do as long as he was at home and I had to take care of him. But I don't think I had any regrets earlier because I had the feeling that I had a right to do the things I did. I mean, to go traveling and gadding off.

Junge: I think that may be part of the spirit of the equality state, don't you think?

Evenson: Maybe.

Junge: Or do you think this is the equality state?

Evenson: Well, I don't know if it really is or not. What do you think?

Junge: I think we like to think it is.

Evenson: Yeah, I'm sure we like to think it is.

Junge: But, in reality, if it weren't for people like you, I wonder whether we really would.

Evenson: I'm not sure we **would, either**. I'm getting kinda' cynical. It seems like, I just, I don't know. I just wonder.

Junge: I don't know, I see the things you've done in your life and I say, "You know, Betty represents that equality that women want," you know. You don't want to deny yourself. **You** just said you wanted to do what you wanted to do.

Evenson: Yes, I **did** but I'm sure that Maurice thought from his point of view, he thought I was a very bad wife—a very poor wife.

Junge: A very selfish person.

Evenson: I was selfish, that's true. Most people that do what they want to do are selfish.

Junge: I don't know.

Evenson: Don't you think, really?

Junge: I think there's something to be said for self-fulfillment.

Evenson: Well, I think I'd have been a worse wife if I hadn't done those things 'cause I'd have been a martyr then. The best thing about me is I wasn't a martyr. I didn't choose to be a martyr. I'd rather just go to town and do something. But then we had a pretty good arrangement because he'd go fishing in the summer and summer was the busiest time at the store so I really had the burden of work

there. And then I went to plays and concerts and writers' classes and stuff in the winter time. Winter's longer than summer so I came out pretty good on that one.

Junge: Oh, I was going to ask you about Peggy Simpson Curry.

Evenson: Oh, yes.

Junge: What are your recollections of her?

Evenson: Oh, she was a wonderful person. She was a dear friend. I really loved her and she probably inspired me to do a lot of writing, too. She was really good. I remember when I started my novel—came to town, and I read this first chapter and I thought it was real good, you know. She said, "The trouble with you," she said, "is that you're just all the time thinking: 'this is Betty Evenson writing a book.'" She said, "To hell with Betty Evenson," she said, "just let your characters write that book." (laughs) So, I did. From then on I took her advice and it sure did get to be a better book.

Junge: That's a good piece of advice. When did she pass away?

Evenson: Oh, let's see, was it ten years ago—about eight years ago? Something like that.

Junge: Wasn't she the poet laureate or something of Wyoming?

Evenson: Uh-huh, she was a beautiful poet, a fabulous writer and a wonderful person, really.

Junge: Did you write poetry?

Evenson: Not really. I've written some poetry but not very good. I'm not a good poet.

I have a couple of poems that I think are fairly good but it's not my medium at all. I'm not a good poet.

Junge: I see.

I'm going to wrap this up, Betty, but I want to ask you something that I'm kind of curious about. It seems like the humor of the people in this state—and this book that I'm working on is going to be about Wyoming people

Evenson: You're working on a book?

Junge: Oh, yeah. I'm working on a book.

Evenson: Well, that's great. Just kinda' like little episodes about different people or what?

Junge: Yeah. I'm doing it pretty much like Peggy Simpson Curry says. I'm going to let the people write this book. I'm going to let the characters write the book.

Evenson: That's wonderful.

Junge: Through their tapes and photographs. So it'll be easy to read. It won't be something (inaudible).

Evenson: Will it be something like Susan Anderson's book?

Junge: Yes. That's about as close a book—Susan Anderson and (unintelligible).

Evenson: Popovich. I don't know how to pronounce his name.

Junge: Zbigniew Bzdak They call him "Speshack" for short.

Evenson: Speshack?

Junge: Yeah, that book is probably about as close as you'd come. It's not going to be quite like that but that's a good book to compare it. But one of the things I

noticed coming into this state and looking back at my twenty-four, twenty-five years in this state is the people here have sort of an interesting sense of humor. It's different from the eastern sense of humor. It's not **one-liners**. People here kid each other a lot, do you know what I mean?

Evenson: Mm-hmm.

Junge: And I'm wondering about that. At least with the company that I keep, humor to people means picking on somebody, and if he's picked on that's almost a sign that he's appreciated and loved.

Evenson: Yeah. I think that's true to a certain extent. (chuckles)

Junge: Did you ever notice that?

Evenson: Yeah. I think I used to notice that at Hiland quite a bit among the—like the bus drivers.

Junge: You know, like you, I'm trying to figure out human behavior. I'm wondering why people do that. Why can't they come in and just, for example, tell you a joke? Why do they have to say, "Well, Betty, I see you haven't been to the hair-dresser's this week." I mean, why do they do things like that?

Evenson: Yeah. Well, they're afraid of being too sentimental, I don't know. That's something to think about. Do you think you'll come to the explanation by the time you get your book finished?

Junge: I'd like to find a humorist who can tell me more about it. (laughs) Yes, I'd like to come to some conclusions about that because it's sort of—not cynical—yes, it's cynical.

Evenson: Kind of.

Junge: It's almost a sadistic thing. I'm not trying to say that people in Wyoming are sadists, but I'm trying to say that kind of humor is a little sadistic and it's not funny unless you can make it relevant to somebody and cut them down to size a little bit.

Evenson: I'm not sure. I really don't like that type of humor too much, either.

Junge: Well, some of it's very mild, you know.

Evenson: Yeah, I know it is.

Junge: Some of it's pretty serious and some of it is (inaudible)

Evenson: Yeah.

Junge: So, I guess you couldn't go as far as to saying it's sadistic but I just kinda' noticed that over the years. But, I don't know.

What do you think is the best thing about living in Wyoming?

Evenson: Oh. The elbow room and the feeling of knowing—I don't know, either knowing so many people or knowing so much about so many people, or I do think the beauty of it is one of the things 'cause I think the country out around Hiland is as beautiful as you could wish for.

Junge: Now, not a lot of people would agree with you.

Evenson: No. Very few people would agree with me but I think it's beautiful. But I try to think what it is about it. I think it's kinda' like being your own man, kinda' being able to be yourself in some way without—and, of course, living in Hiland gave me that opportunity much more than I would've had living somewhere else, I think.

Junge: You really do talk about the benefits of living at Hiland.

Evenson: It really was for my particular type person. Now, I don't think all people would have liked it there. I don't think my daughter would because she's very different from myself. She's a very good wife and she probably watched her mother's rotten performance (chuckles) —gave her a notion to be a good wife. Just like, she was such a good housekeeper 'cause I was never too good a **housekeeper**. **But** I think she would be more inclined to think it would be too confining a life out there, you know, to have to be there too much of the time and not be able to devote enough time to her family and her husband.

Junge: Nine out of ten people, I'll bet when I ask them that question or question similar to that, would answer "Open spaces—the wide open spaces."

Evenson: Mm-hmm. I think that's one of the nicest things.

Junge: And I think one of the things that interests me is that the Chamber of Commerce types, the boomers and **main streeters** that try to build up the state's economy in a way are kinda' going against the grain, aren't they? Because so many people like to see this state stay like it is.

Evenson: Yeah, that's true. We've got to have some economy on the practical side. We can't just have no work for people, can we?

Junge: No.

Evenson: I suppose we have to have some of that practical stuff.

Junge: But, you know, you notice that one of the things that Wyomingites take pride in is the fact that they're the least populated.

Evenson: Oh, yes, yes. I used to take great pride in that.

Junge: That they have that kind of elbow room.

This state's been good to you.

Evenson: Oh, yes. But the more I think about it—I'm going to think more about what you were asking me about the **Women's Lib** stuff. I think I need to think about that. Maybe I'll write about **that**, or talk it into a tape or something **sometime—**
—about how I really feel about that because I don't really know what my feelings were. I would have resented it very much, you know, that if I hadn't—if I'd have had to be a mousy little Mrs. Evenson, you know.

Junge: Mm-hmm

Evenson: But my husband, you **see—**. **For** instance, typical of the kind of relationship was that when I went into the bookstore I happened to open a charge account, and the lady that ran it knew me and she put "Betty Evenson" on it. So, she sent the bill to Betty Evenson, Hiland. Well, my husband was paying the bills. He handed me that and he said, "Here," he said, "you can pay this bill. This is your bill." Because if it had been "**Mrs. Maurice Evenson**" he would have paid **it** but he couldn't bear—you see, he was a Norwegian and, boy, **they're** old world-ish.

Junge: Yeah. Well, you had a sort of unique explanation of what you did with this money when you got it from your sales.

Evenson: Oh, yes. My riotous living.

Junge: Now, how did you divide that **up** again?

Evenson: **Let's** see. A third of it for travel, a third of it for household expenses and a third of it for riotous living (laughs) **which**, Christy asked me, "What are you going to do for your riotous living this time, Mama?" (both laugh)

Junge: Well, your husband must have appreciated that.

Evenson: Oh, no. He thought that was silly.

Junge: Did he?

Evenson: He didn't like my writing. The only time he accepted my writing was after he knew Peggy Curry because she was such a marvelous fisherman. And he took her fishing up in the Platte River Canyon and he decided anybody that was a writer and could fish like that must not be all bad, so writers must not be as bad as he thought. (laughs) He loved Peggy, too. She was a great friend.

Junge: Are Norwegians the ones that drink coffee without cream or with cream?

Evenson: Without. They just drink coffee all day long from morning 'til night.

Junge: And can still sleep at night?

Evenson: Oh, yeah, like a log and half the next day.

Junge: Do you sleep well?

Evenson: Not too. Since I've had arthritis I don't sleep too well.

Junge: Mm-hmm. Betty are you going to do anymore traveling, do you think?

Evenson: No, I'll never be able to travel anymore. I just can't ride in a conveyance of any kind that long. It's about all I can do to ride in a car around town, is about all I can do. I just can't. The kids wanted me to come to Germany because my daughter's in Germany but you couldn't pay me to go to Germany. I just couldn't take a trip like that, that long in a plane, and I just really don't want to travel anymore because what fun would it be when I couldn't do any of the things? What would be the point in it, you know, when you can't do anything? You have to admit when you're licked. So all I can do is concentrate on the

things I can do and make the best of that but as far as trying to do things I used to enjoy I just can't do it.

Junge: What does retirement mean to you?

Evenson: Retirement was wonderful when I first came into town. It was great. I had this boyfriend, and we went together for ten years, and we went dancing all the time and we had a wonderful time. We didn't want to get married because, as we said, we'd been married. (laughs) So we just had a good time and we went on a couple of cruises. We went on a cruise to Panama and on a cruise to—I finally found out where Bermuda was—and on down to the Caribbean. So we really had some real nice trips. But then he had a stroke, and so his daughter lives in Montana, and she took him home with her, so I don't see him anymore.

Junge: You know, one of the people that you probably know, and I thought was real interesting and I had a chance to meet here was Gertrude Krampert.

Evenson: Yeah. I know who she is. I never did really know her.

Junge: Apparently she was a Sandbar lady.

Evenson: Yeah, that's what I hear. Everybody always asked, "How did she make all her money?" And they say, "On her back." (both laugh)

Junge: And yet she bought the (unintelligible)

Evenson: Yeah, the theatre (unintelligible)

Junge: (unintelligible) Now there's an interesting story for you.

Evenson: Yeah.

Junge: She was a tough lady. I'll tell you what, you could go out to the retirement home where she's at and you could get—if you were thinking about doing more writing and using exact words there's a lady that—.

Evenson: Yeah, I'll bet she'd have the real words.

Junge: Oh, yeah. And she's down on men. Oh, boy, she really gives 'em hell. Nimi McConigley and I went out there.

Evenson: Oh, yeah, she's a fabulous person.

Junge: She is. And she brought Gertrude and this older fellow about the same age as Gertrude, maybe a little younger, out together in wheelchairs and put them in the lobby of this retirement home and let them go at it. And I felt sorry for the guy 'cause I don't think he got the best of the deal.

Evenson: (laughs)

Junge: Well, listen, we'd better cut this off and get the books and the pictures taken care of. Do you think we've taken care of everything?

Evenson: I think so.

Junge: Where is Christy now?

Evenson: She's in Germany. See, George is a band director. Her husband is a band director in the army and I thought sure he might have to go because they were taking all those troops to Germany, you know—all those NATO Force troops— but he didn't have to go. But there were only three bands left in his area, so he's been real busy with that and she teaches school. She teaches the third grade kids over there. They love it there.

Junge: His last name is Armijo?

Evenson: Right.

Junge: Now is that the same Armijo that—wait a minute. Isn't that a sheep family?

Evenson: No, this family lives in Cheyenne. His father worked on the railroad. They were just not—you know, they came from very poor roots. But his brother is a professor at Montana, one of the colleges in Montana.

Junge: Now your background is what? What country are your parents from?

Evenson: Well, I think probably mostly from England. England or Germany, maybe.

Junge: I'm curious about this. Was there any problem when she married into a Hispanic family?

Evenson: Well, there was for me. I didn't like it. I didn't approve of it at all. Well, I mostly didn't approve of it because of the fact that he was so young. They were so young. He was nineteen and she was twenty, twenty-one, I guess. She's two years older than he is. Anyhow, he was so young that instead of having a bachelor party for him the groomsmen put him to bed and took the bridesmaids out the night before the wedding 'cause he couldn't go to any bars. I wasn't in favor of the wedding at all because neither of them were through college and, of course, I had pictured Christy marrying somebody much more, you know, established like a professional man or something like that. And I didn't approve of him being Mexican either. I didn't approve of that. I was very narrow-minded and that was one instance in which Maurice was much better than I. He was a better parent in one way than I was because he said, "That's Christy's choice. Christy knows what she's doing. We have to trust it to her and so that's fine. Whatever Christy wants that's what she

shall have. She's got a good head on her shoulders." And it worked out alright. For a little while I was kind of dubious but he said that after he got his degree—then they were in Laramie. And after he got his degree, why, of course, she got pregnant right away. And so after the first baby came and he got his degree they lived in Laramie and he took care of the baby while she got her degree, which I didn't ever expect would happen.

Junge: How many grandkids do you have?

Evenson: Two. A boy and a girl.

Junge: And now do they have kids?

Evenson: Yeah. They have three. I've got three great-grandchildren and another one on the way.

Junge: Are you going to be able to see some great-great grandchildren, do you think?

Evenson: Oh, no. They're just really young. The great-grandchildren are just school kids. But they like it in Germany so well. They were supposed to come home in June but I think they got their things changed. I mean, their time is supposed to be up in June but I think on account of the war they got things changed around so I don't think they'll be here this year.

Junge: Have they said that they're proud of their grandmother being an author? Do they know that you're an author?

Evenson: Oh, yes. They were here for the big party. They gave the party for me, the autograph party—George and Christy did—and they were a beautiful host and hostess. They were great, and we had a nice time, and the grandchildren came

and the great-grandchildren, so I saw everybody last summer. That's the last time I'll probably see 'em.

Junge: Do you think you'll get an award for that book?

Evenson: Well, I got the Wyoming Press Women's award for the state but I figured they probably didn't have many books. Well, they had five books submitted. I found out from Elaine they had five books. But I got first place for that and they sent it to National. Now, if it should win a prize from National Press Women then I would really be set up. I would really be happy about that because that would be quite an honor.

Junge: When you get over your sister's death maybe you should think about doing some more writing.

Evenson: Well, I know I should. I would like to. I've got jillions of things that I could write about. I could write about the stuff in the family that I wasn't able to put in the book. Everybody'd be dead by that time and then I could put it all in.
(both laugh)

Junge: You don't regret the fact that people got mad at you once in a while for writing when you were writing the confession stories and telling (inaudible).

Evenson: Oh, no, not really.

Junge: That doesn't bother you, does it?

Evenson: I don't like to hurt anybody's feelings but if I wrote a book about people I'd (unintelligible). As my grandchildren kept saying, I could just go ahead and tell anything I wanted to but I (chuckles) didn't. Some of the things I knew I didn't tell.

Junge: You ought to think about writing a column in the paper.

Evenson: Yeah, that would be kinda' nice to write but I don't think Charles likes me well enough to allow a column in there.

Junge: Charles?

Evenson: Charles Levendosky. He's the editor of that kind of stuff so I don't think he'd care much for that.

Junge: Well, he's our poet laureate now.

Evenson: Uh-huh, I think so. He's a good poet. He has some beautiful poetry.

Junge: He doesn't think much of your writing, is that it?

Evenson: No, not really. (chuckles) When I took that poetry class off of him it was really funny. I read that poem that I thought was pretty good and he said, "Well," he said, "It's plain that Betty's accustomed to being paid by the word in her writing." (laughs) It was a little wordy. After he got through with it, I saw that it had about a hundred words more than it needed, which was only about fifty (both laugh)

Junge: Why did you take all those writing classes under (unintelligible)

Evenson: Oh, it was so much fun. I loved taking the classes and I learned something every single year that I took them—thirty years—never missed hardly any classes. In fact, it gave me a good excuse to come to town every week.

Junge: I suppose that's true, yeah.

Evenson: And Maurice could never say I couldn't come to town on writers' night.

Junge: You had some hairy experiences on that road between Hiland and Casper.

Evenson: Yes, I did have a few.

Junge: But I liked your description in the book about you were in your own little world.

Evenson: Yeah, that's right. I loved that going back and forth. I loved the driving back and forth. In fact, really, almost everything that I did I really liked really well.

Junge: You take a great deal of pleasure in life.

Evenson: Except a few things that I didn't like, but I—and I suppose in lots of ways I probably wasn't fair to Maurice—but I don't know. It worked out alright.

Junge: Well, Betty, let's shut this off. I appreciate your time and just want to thank you.

Evenson: Yeah, you're welcome. It was fun. I enjoyed it.

Junge: I enjoyed it too. Well, shall we take a picture or what?

Evenson: Well, I guess. I look like sin but it doesn't matter. When you're eighty-one years old nobody really expects you to look very good anyway.

Junge: Well, now that's pretty stoic.

Evenson: Something. It's kind of foolish, I think.